

BIRD-LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY

CHARLES DIXON

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BIRD-LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY.



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BIRD-LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY

BEING

EIGHT YEARS' GLEANINGS AMONG THE
BIRDS OF DEVONSHIRE

BY

CHARLES DIXON

*Author of 'Rural Bird-Life'; 'The Game Birds and Wild-Fowl of the
British Islands'; 'British Sea Birds'; 'Curiosities of Bird-Life';
'The Migration of Birds'; 'The Migration of British Birds,' etc.*

WITH TEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES WHYMPER,
AND A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE.



THE present volume, as its title suggests, is a record of some of the observations made during a residence of eight years on the south coast of Devonshire, and on many excursions into various other parts of the county. In some respects it may be regarded as a record of comparison ; for I have studied the bird-life of this area coming as a stranger to the county and its ornis, and with a life-long ornithological experience gained in more northern and eastern shires.

By all British ornithologists Devonshire must ever be regarded as classic ground ; for years it was the home of Montagu—one of the Fathers of Field Ornithology—and within its borders many of those discoveries were made which are inseparably associated with his name. Few other

counties in England present us with a greater diversity of physical aspect; and certainly no other shire is blessed with a milder and more equable climate. So far as sedentary birds are concerned, the county is rich in species, and most branches of our resident avifauna are well represented. But the same can scarcely be said of migratory species, the county being very unfavourably situated for them. Indeed, next to Cornwall, I should feel inclined to class Devonshire as the poorest littoral county in England for normal migratory birds, lying, as it does, too far to the south-west. Its poorness in this respect, however, is not without compensations to the scientific student of the dispersal and migration of Birds, as I have pointed out elsewhere. So far as abnormal migrants are concerned, Devonshire can compare favourably with any other county. Devonshire is *par excellence* a field naturalist's county; an area in which outdoor work can be carried on throughout the year under the most favourable and pleasant conditions, abounding with an avifauna of exceeding diversity. Some of our

rarest British birds still find a sanctuary here ; one or two species are commoner here than elsewhere.

I proffer these random gleanings among the birds of Devonshire—many of them culled during periods of relaxation, with gun and field-glass, from more serious scientific work—as a popular contribution to the bird-lore of the county, addressed rather to the lover of birds than to the scientific student of them, and with no greater pretensions than to interest the general reader, or possibly first to attract and then to instruct the visitor with ornithological tastes to this highly-favoured corner of the British Isles.

CHARLES DIXON.

PAIGNTON, S. DEVON,
November 1898.

CONTENTS.

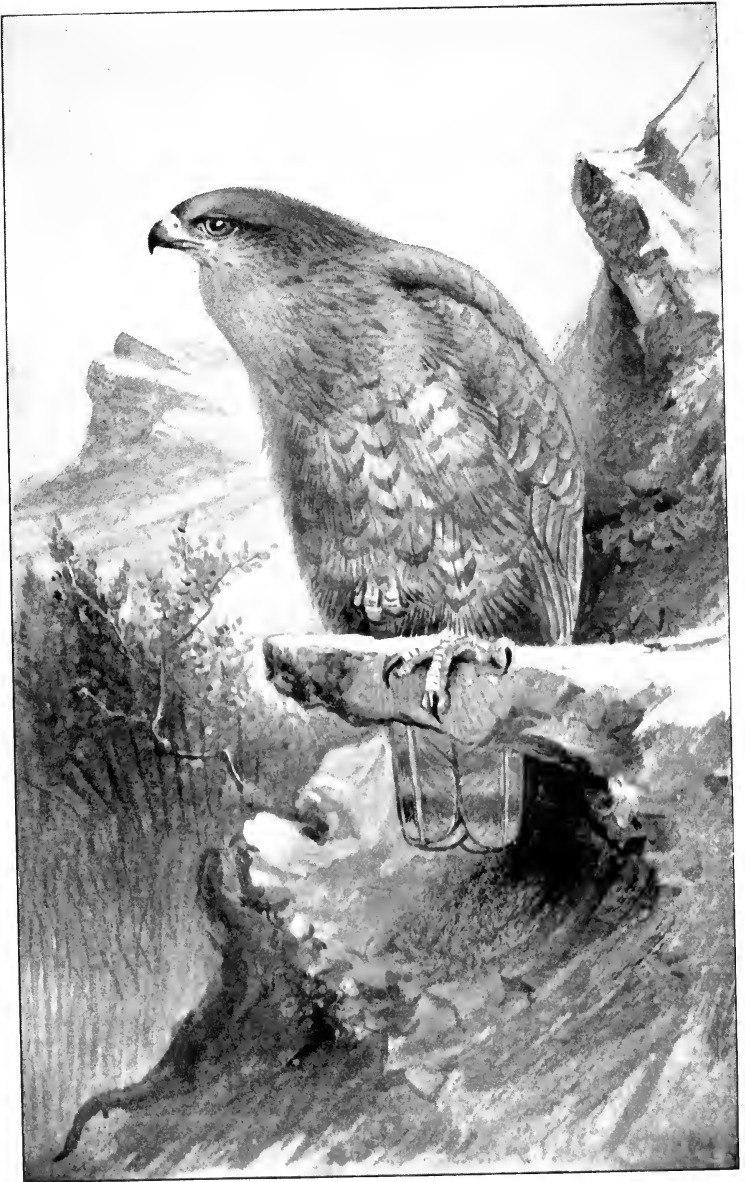


CHAPTER I.		PAGE
AMONGST THE HEATHER AND GORSE	.	11
CHAPTER II.		
GARDEN AND ORCHARD BIRD-LIFE	.	39
CHAPTER III.		
BIRD-LIFE BY RIVER AND STREAM	.	69
CHAPTER IV.		
BIRD-LIFE OF LAKE, SWAMP, AND REED BED	.	97
CHAPTER V.		
BIRD-LIFE IN FIELD AND HEDGEROW	.	125
CHAPTER VI.		
BIRD-LIFE OF THE WOODS AND GROVES	.	153
CHAPTER VII.		
BIRD-LIFE ALONG THE SHORE	.	181

CHAPTER VIII.		PAGE
BIRD-LIFE UPON THE CLIFFS . . .		207
CHAPTER IX.		
BIRD-LIFE AT SEA		239
CHAPTER X.		
MIGRATION IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY . . .		269

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PORTRAIT OF AUTHOR	<i>Frontispiece</i>
COMMON BUZZARD, DARTMOOR	<i>To face page 11</i>
GOLDFINCHES AND NEST IN A DEVON	
ORCHARD	39
HERONS FISHING	69
BIRD-LIFE AT SLAPTON LEY	97
RED-BACKED SHRIKE, TORQUAY	125
GREEN WOODPECKERS	153
RINGED PLOVERS, PAIGNTON SANDS	181
RAVEN, START POINT	207
BIRD GATHERINGS, TOR BAY	239
SWALLOWS MIGRATING ALONG PAIGNTON	
SANDS, 7TH, 8TH SEPT., 1898	269



COMMON BUZZARD,--DARTMOOR.

BIRD-LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY.



CHAPTER I.

AMONGST THE HEATHER AND GORSE.

TO persons with a long experience of the vast tracts of moorland that stretch in almost uninterrupted monotony from the Welsh mountains or the Peak of Derbyshire to the Highlands, the "moors" of Devonshire must always seem unworthy of the name—their limited area and comparatively cultivated aspect depriving them of that rugged grandeur which is the most characteristic feature of the moors as a north-country man knows and loves and understands them. The heather is by no means universal; and the ornithologist will miss many a bird peculiar

to the extensive northern wastes. Devon's moors possess no attraction for the Red Grouse; neither do they offer a sanctuary to the Merlin or the larger Raptorial birds; while such birds as the Twite, the Whimbrel, the Golden Plover, the Dunlin, and the Skuas, that lend such a charm of life to the northern moors, are all conspicuous by their absence. So far as bird-life is concerned, the only links that connect these southern uplands with the wilder and typical moors are perhaps the Ring Ouzel, the Grey Wagtail, the Curlew, the Wheatear, and the Snipe; but some of these are by no means abundantly represented, and, to tell the truth, seem out of place—laggards that have been left behind as the species moved northwards in the dim prehistoric ages when life was slowly struggling polewards after glacial conditions had been modified. Even these very lands themselves seem but as scattered and lost fragments of the northern moors dropped as it were into a luxuriant natural garden, and surrounded by some of the most fertile country in all England. Neither do we meet with any compensations so far as these Devonshire moors are concerned—there are no species found upon them that may not be met with

in even greater plenty farther north. Although, from an ornithological point of view, they are somewhat disappointing, a long residence upon their borders and many rambles across them seem to suggest a selection from the various notes relating to their bird-life which we have made from time to time.

Take Dartmoor, for instance,—of unenviable notoriety in one respect, and that its convict prison,—which rests like a great granite scar on the otherwise fertile and luxuriant country-side; a vast waste of almost primeval upland, billowy in its unevenness, rising on every side into lofty tors, or sinking into rock-bound valleys, or widening out into level expanses of treacherous bog, scored in all directions with dancing streams, and strewn with huge boulders of granite. Fern and heather and gorse seem everywhere striving to gain supremacy and threatening to overgrow the pastures and patches of cultivated ground that have been snatched, as it were, from the waste. And yet the verdure and fertility for which Devon is so famous are largely due to the abundant moisture which gathers on Dartmoor and disperses to the lowlands in that wonderful network of rills and rivers

that is so prominent a feature of the moor and its outskirts.

Although the actual moor or "forest" is comparatively a desolate region, some of the border valleys are exquisitely beautiful, well-wooded and watered, and abounding in bird-life. Then, again, the moorland farms are regarded as oases by the feathered tribe; and wherever man has wrested bits of land from the surrounding wilderness, so surely may the observer count upon meeting with bird company of some kind. On the moor itself, however, all is different, and we are confronted with an ornithological anomaly which, so far as our experience extends, is practically unique. The scenery and surroundings suggest species that are not there; in summer Dartmoor is very thinly populated with birds, so unlike the northern moorlands that possess a very distinct and characteristic avifauna at that season; in winter it is even yet more desolate, for there are no indigenous forms to lend that ever-welcome touch of life which, even at that season, the typical moors are never without. To the lover of wild scenery and panoramic views, to the seeker after robust health and bracing air, Dartmoor may

leave nothing to be desired ; the botanist may be satisfied, the entomologist find much of interest, and the antiquarian derive many pleasures, but the lover of birds must of necessity turn somewhat disappointed away.

From whichever side Dartmoor may be visited the approaches are very similar in general character, and a stiff climb of a thousand feet or more must first be negotiated by the explorer, ere he finds himself upon the undulating plateau of which the "moor" itself is composed. Should the time be early summer, plenty of the commoner birds may be met with on the journey up, but the observer will not fail to remark that as the more barren country is reached these become fewer. Above the upland pastures the Skylarks will be heard in most directions pouring forth a torrent of glad, wild melody ; while here and there from the summit of some wayside bush, or perchance the telegraph wire, the Common Bunting reels off his creaking, rusty song with irritating persistency. But when once the beaten track is left and the rugged moor itself is invaded, one or two more characteristic species will be met with. On the uneven granite-strewn hillsides, especially in the

vicinity of the "tors," the Wheatear will most likely be seen. The Wheatear can scarcely be classed as a common bird in the West Country, and Dartmoor is most certainly its headquarters during the breeding season. With the Chiffchaff it must be ranked as one of our very earliest spring migrants, appearing upon the coasts of South Devon during the closing days of March. These migrants follow certain routes from the coast to the uplands with amazing regularity. Both in spring and autumn we have remarked a few Wheatears in certain spots along the coast, as well as in special haunts inland, where almost to the day for seven years in succession they could be looked for with certainty. Few of these Wheatears linger in the coast districts to breed, passing northwards to the moors for that purpose. We have nowhere met with this bird in such numbers on Dartmoor as in the vicinity of the far-famed Haytor rocks. A couple of summers ago we spent some time upon the summit of this peak (it is about twelve hundred feet above sea-level) watching the engaging ways of a brood of Wheatears and their parents. The nest was made in a totally inaccessible

spot far under one of the enormous granite blocks that form the smaller of the two crests of which Haytor is composed. Keeping perfectly still, we watched the young birds come out from under the rock and be fed by the old birds, which kept flying up with insects every few minutes. At the least alarm the watchful little creatures, still unable to fly, retired beneath the pile of granite, venturing forth again when the note of their parents told them that all was safe. We have also repeatedly noticed Barn Swallows far on the moor, in the vicinity of the various tors especially, but are unable to say whether they breed there or not. In many of the old quarries the Stock Dove may frequently be met with, whilst the Carrion Crow and the Jackdaw are by no means rare. The Raven, though in sadly diminished numbers, still finds a safe retreat on Dartmoor, and we cannot recall a visit to the locality without meeting with one or more of these bold and handsome birds. The Grey Wagtail, the Redstart, and the Dipper must also be included in our short list of moorland birds, but in our experience these species are inhabitants of the border valleys rather than the open plateau. To us, one of the most

interesting birds found on Dartmoor is the Ring Ouzel. It is very local and by no means common, found principally in the vicinity of the higher and wilder tors, its migrations, like those of the Wheatear, being easily traced from the various headlands on the coast inland to the moors. The Ring Ouzel, however, does not seem to rest so much on the way, apparently reaching the uplands in one flight. It not only arrives in parties in April, but leaves in still larger gatherings during September and October. These spring flights of Ring Ouzels soon disperse when the moors are reached, and the bird during summer is chiefly met with in locally scattered pairs. We are also of opinion that numbers of Ring Ouzels seen on Dartmoor during spring are merely passing migrants on their way to more northern haunts; and the same remarks apply to the flocks sometimes seen in autumn, these being composed of individuals simply crossing the moor on the return passage. There can be no doubt, however, that the bird breeds sparingly in this district, a fact which we can confirm from personal experience. Its favourite haunts are the rock-strewn slopes and ridges, the gorse and heath-grown banks of streams,

where the bird makes itself remarkably conspicuous by its noisy chatter and habit of perching on some tall bush of heath or furze, where its black and white plumage may be discerned from afar. A Ring Ouzel will not unfrequently attend an intruder for long distances, flitting ahead of him for short distances and awaiting his approach, then passing on again, all the time uttering noisy cries and full of apparent irritation at the disturbance. The nest (placed on or near the ground, and sometimes on the side of a turf pit) and eggs are too much like those of the more familiar Blackbird to require detailed description here. Upon the wetter parts of the moor the Meadow Pipit is by no means uncommon, whilst in some of the more extensive bogs and mires the Common Snipe may be met with employed in domestic duties; but whether the Dunlin breeds regularly in the district is by no means certain. Care, however, should be exercised in exploring these moorland bogs, for they are treacherous in the extreme, and quake and tremble most uncomfortably as they are walked over. The bright yellowish-green patches should be specially avoided, or the unfortunate enthusiast may sink into difficulties of a very

unpleasant if not downright dangerous character. Lapwings, we should say, are still fairly common during the breeding season on certain parts of the moor, and their complaining wailing notes, suggestive of solitude, give a welcome sense of life to otherwise deserted wastes. Dartmoor cannot be regarded as a district rich in raptorial birds. Legend says that the Golden Eagle once bred within its boundaries; tradition informs us that the Kite was common there a hundred years ago; whilst Montagu's Harrier formerly bred there in fair plenty until brought to the verge of extermination by the gamekeepers. Nowadays the moor seems to be frequented regularly by Kestrels and Common Buzzards only. Now and then a Harrier, or a Rough-legged Buzzard on migration, may visit it, but the ordinary observer's chance of seeing them is very remote. The Common Buzzard breeds in one or two localities known to us, but these, in the interests of the bird, we forbear specially to name. It is difficult to suggest a reason for the absence of such a species as the Merlin during summer, and we should almost suspect that it is overlooked. We have a note of its occurrence, possibly on passage, between

Torquay and Newton Abbot. Another bird very characteristic of the northern moors also found on Dartmoor is the Cuckoo. We have heard its cheery cry in most localities from April onwards to about the third week in June. Another Picarian bird found somewhat commonly on various parts of this moorland is the Swift. Like the Swallow, this bird may often be seen coursing round the rugged summits of the numerous "tors," and in the crevices of these rocks it must of necessity nest. This rock-haunting habit of the Swift is a very interesting one, and undoubtedly indicates the usual method of nesting in those far-off times when buildings were not available.

The winter aspect of bird-life upon Dartmoor is much less inviting. Small birds are almost entirely absent, and the vast waste is tenanted by little more than a few Snipe and Ducks, if we except the Black Grouse that are sparingly distributed and seldom seen. We know of few localities more desolate and dreary than this wild upland during winter, subject as it is at that season especially to copious rains and mists, the latter often gathering with startling suddenness, and proving an inconvenience if not a downright

danger to the unsuspecting wanderer unprovided with map or compass.

Thus briefly may be summarised the chief avine characteristics of an otherwise singularly beautiful district, romantic in its wild grandeur, and, so far as England is concerned, possibly without a rival for the panoramic views of vast tracts of country which roll away from its barren tors and peaks in a fertile expanse smiling with pastures and woods, stretching out to the distant sea. Meagre may Dartmoor's bird-life be, but the little that this district possesses forms one of its brightest summer charms, and helps considerably to its full enjoyment.

Now a few words concerning bird-life amongst the gorse. We believe there is an old Devonshire saying to the effect that the golden bloom of the gorse is, like kissing, never out of season. So far as the bloom is concerned this is literally true; as for the other part of the wise old saw, we will leave that for the West Country swains and maidens to decide amongst themselves. In Devonshire the gorse, like the ivy, may be met with almost everywhere, in some places covering many acres of ground, where, summer and winter alike,

its burnished golden blossoms gaily decorate many an otherwise barren waste. Much rough land in the neighbourhood of the moors is densely clothed with gorse; many of the downs, especially along the south coast between Teignmouth and Plymouth, the railway embankments and cuttings, and the steep sides of numberless "coombes" or valleys, are dotted with gorse coverts and thickets in abundance. Particularly fine coverts of this description may be found here and there along the shores of Tor Bay, and on the sides of some of the sheltered coombes running inland; whilst a considerable portion of the downs comprising the noble headland of Berry Head is clothed with a dense growth of this prickly shrub. These gorse coverts are a favourite haunt of bird-life. The cover they afford is warm and dense, and so impenetrable to enemies of all kinds as to be absolutely safe. We have often remarked the proneness of most gorse-frequenting species to perch on the topmost twigs, to sit and sing and sun themselves, and as it were court observation, as if fully conscious of their ability instantly to elude pursuit by dropping into the spine-decked shrubs below. In Devonshire one of the most

familiar birds of the gorse coverts is the Linnet. Almost throughout the year this species may be met with amongst them, especially those in the immediate vicinity of the sea. Early in the spring vast numbers of Linnets from winter quarters more to the south-west of the county pass along the coast districts of the South Hams on their way to moorland and northern breeding haunts, and at this period the song of the males uttered in concert is very lively and engaging. Shortly after these flights have passed on the resident Linnets may be seen in pairs, the males gay in their carmine livery, looking very beautiful as they deftly poise upon the topmost sprays of golden bloom to warble a bridal song. In this area the Linnet is always socially inclined, and numbers of nests may be found amongst the same patch of gorse by those possessing sufficient courage to penetrate its prickly recesses. The Linnet is by no means a shy or a timid bird, and often sits and sings within a few feet of the passer-by, if disturbed merely flitting along a pace or so and resuming its song. Then in autumn we may find the migratory individuals returning with their young; whilst even in winter the dark furze is

a safe and welcome roosting place for the flocks that resort to the stubbles and weed-grown wastes near the sea at that season.

Another equally conspicuous bird in these localities is the Stonechat. In many parts of the north of England the Stonechat is a regular migrant, leaving the gorse coverts entirely during the winter months; but in this favoured southern county it may be seen amongst them right through the year. It may be readily identified by its black head and white neck patches, as well as by its oft-repeated and monotonous double note of *wee-chic*. It is a somewhat shy and restless little bird, becoming especially so when its nesting place is invaded. Sometimes for minutes together it will sit in one position upon the summit of a furze bush, uttering its note at intervals; but if approached too closely it flits off in a drooping, unsteady manner to another bush, soon perhaps to be joined by its mate, which follows precisely the same antics. The nest, with its blue eggs faintly speckled with rusty brown, is most cunningly concealed amongst the long dry grass at the foot of a bush, and its whereabouts are seldom betrayed directly by the birds themselves. Many a pleasant

hour may be passed among the gorse upon the summit of Berry Head in watching the actions of the Stonechats and other birds. Swifts may be seen darting hither and thither, screaming in their joy; whilst fleet-winged Swallows search the downs in unceasing flight, and the slower-moving Sand Martins pass to and fro along the range of cliffs. From the wooded coombe below the voice of Blackbird and Thrush and Warbler sounds faint and sweet; whilst the harsh cries of the Herring Gulls and Jackdaws are borne fitfully upon the early summer breeze. Air and ground around us are palpitating with song and life; and far below the blue sea glints and sparkles in the sunshine, studded with trawlers beating up to quaint and sleepy old Brixham, nestling in the valley and on the hillsides. Up here, amongst the scented gorse and heath and wild thyme, you may sit and watch the comings and the goings of the birds, surrounded with a panoramic vista which is bounded on the one side by the blue misty outlines of the breezy tors of Dartmoor, and the bold and rugged outline of the coast, from the white cliffs of Beer beyond Exmouth out to the hazy horizon of the Channel, on the other; mingling with all a thread of human

interest from the crowded harbour below and the sturdy fisherfolk ceaselessly engaged in garnering the perennial harvest of the sea.

Along many of the sheltered coombe sides, where patches of gorse are mingled amongst the underwood, we shall be pretty sure to meet with another very interesting species, the Long-tailed Titmouse. In Devonshire especially this pretty little bird is extremely partial to the tall gorse bushes as nesting places; and we know certain spots in which several nests may be found every spring. The birds do not wander far from these covers all the year round, but the young broods disappear in some unaccountable way, the nests never increasing in number. It is an active, sprightly bird, by no means shy, and may be watched actually building its beautiful nest at a distance of a few paces, provided some small caution be exercised. We have so stood amongst the gorse by the half-hour together, and remarked the engaging ways of the Long-tailed Titmouse when so building. Both birds work at the task. One nest we kept under special observation last spring was about one-third completed when we found it; and it was most interesting to see the

tiny long-tailed birds flitting up in turn every few moments with a scrap of lichen or a bit of spider's web, and to watch how they deftly wove each scrap into the walls of the globular structure. They worked from the inside upwards, and were continually pulling at the sides here and there, as if to secure the proper degree of rotundity. Each scrap of green lichen was gathered from the neighbouring trees, and endless were the attitudes assumed by the little architects in working in the materials. Not a feather was brought in this particular case until the outer shell was practically completed: then visits were regularly made to a poultry run at some distance for the soft feathers with which the nest was lined, the birds bringing one at a time: hair was obtained from a cow-shed in an adjoining meadow. As the nest approached completion the parent birds became more cautious in visiting it, and would sometimes hop about the surrounding bushes for a long time without daring to enter it. This particular nest absorbed the greater part of a fortnight to complete it, and several more days elapsed, so far as we could gather, before the first egg was laid in it.

In past years the Dartford Warbler seemed to

be widely distributed over the gorse coverts of Devonshire, but nowadays the bird seems entirely to have disappeared from its wonted haunts. Nearly a hundred years ago Montagu obtained the nest eggs and young from a gorse covert near Kingsbridge, but it may be sought for in that neighbourhood now in vain. It is difficult to account for the apparently complete extermination of the species in the county, unless we attribute it to exceptionally severe winters. Not that excessive cold would kill the little creatures, but it would seriously affect their food supply and thus bring death. Personally, we are inclined to cherish the hope that the species still lingers in the county. The Dartford Warbler is an excessively skulking species, frequents haunts that are rarely penetrated by those competent to identify the bird, and might very easily be confused with the Long-tailed Titmouse. We are bound to say, however, that notwithstanding many a diligent search (pursued sometimes under circumstances the reverse of comfortable in its wonted cover) our efforts up to the present time have met with no success.

As some compensation, however, we are pleased

to say that the Grasshopper Warbler—another very interesting species—is by no means an uncommon if a local bird. We mention it specially here, because the spot most favoured by its presence best known to us is the gorse-covered side of a lovely sheltered coombe running inland from Torbay up towards the tiny village of Marldon. Here, curiously enough, its numbers vary considerably from year to year. We have strolled up this quiet valley soon after dawn on a calm morning in early summer, and heard half-a-dozen birds reeling in concert from the gorse, occasionally getting a peep at one or other of them as they ran up the bushes in a mouse-like manner, or paused for a few fleeting moments on a topmost spray. In other seasons perhaps not more than a single bird would be heard at a time. The whirring song, reeled off in spells of a minute or more in duration, is certainly the most curious avine music that the English woodlands contain. It may be described as a continuous tremulous trill, like the running down of clock-work, and has nothing to recommend it but its curious and novel monotony. Unlike the sedentary Dartford Warbler the present species is migratory, arriving

in its Devonshire haunts some time during the latter half of April, and leaving them again in September. An apparent social tendency is suggested by this species during the breeding season, and numbers of nests are often made at no great distance from each other, but we do not believe the bird is a social one in the strict meaning of the term. The Grasshopper Warbler is an adept at concealing its nest; a very fortunate circumstance in some localities where almost every school-boy is an inveterate bird's-nester. When the nest is made among furze, hidden away amidst the tangled grass and gorse, in cover so dense that often a tunnel or "run" is formed to approach it, discovery is excessively difficult. Made of dry grass and bits of moss, lined with finer stems, it is rather deep and compact, and the five or six eggs may be readily distinguished by their pinkish appearance, thickly dusted with spots of reddish brown and grey. There is just one other species we may allude to ere leaving the furze, and that is the Stock Dove. This species is evidently increasing in numbers, and extending its range in many parts of the county. Another very interesting fact is the marked partiality of this species for

maritime districts—places in which we expect to meet with the Rock Dove only. The latter bird, however, is excessively rare and local on the Devonshire coast. We have not seen it; and during a residence of eight years in the immediate vicinity of cliffs in every way suited to the bird, we have heard of but one genuine example being obtained, and that near Berry Head. All along the bold coast-line of South Devon the Stock Dove is the Pigeon of the cliffs and downs; but of this, more anon. What we wish to dwell upon here is the bird's habit of roosting and nesting among furze. Many gorse coverts along the downs in little frequented parts of the coast contain several pairs of breeding birds, and in some localities isolated clumps of furze bushes generally in inaccessible parts of the cliffs contain an odd nest. This is usually built in a hole amongst the dead gorse well under the bushes, and in some cases is reached by a regular passage. In some parts of the county, at any rate, the Partridge and the Pheasant are very fond of nesting among gorse, and the coverts everywhere are a favourite roosting place for many kinds of birds.

Still keeping to the districts of the gorse, a few words may here be devoted to the bird-life of the warrens—tracts of rough uninclosed land or sand-hills, in some places scored into a network of trenches by the encroaching sea, as, for instance, between Starcross and Dawlish, where passengers by the Great Western Railway can catch many a peep at bird-life from the carriage windows; in others situated on higher ground, as between Churston and Brixham, or between the latter place and Berry Head. In most of these places gorse is plentiful, if growing in more or less scattered clumps, or with patches of stony and bramble- and bracken-covered ground here and there among the coverts. We need not stay now to dwell upon the departed ornithological riches of the famous warren upon the banks of the Exe, but will confine ourselves to the present-day aspect of these localities. A familiar bird in most of them is the Common Bunting, a species most abundant within sight of the sea in all parts of the county. This, the plainest, is at the same time the largest of the British Buntings, and its notes are out and away the least musical. The clumsy-looking bird, as

likely as not, will first be noticed sitting in solitary state upon the top of a bush, a tall weed, or a wall. Little alarmed at your closer approach, the ungainly songster flutters in a laboured manner, often with legs dangling down, to a neighbouring bush to repeat his musical performance. Then another and possibly more interesting species found in these localities is the Nightjar, or Goatsucker. During the bright sunny hours of day the bird is rarely seen, unless flushed from the rocky and stone-strewn ground amongst the gorse, or from the tall bracken and heather. It flies away in an uncertain Owl-like manner, and always seems glad to dip into the first available cover that may present. But as the dusk creeps over the fields and commons the Goatsuckers come forth of their own accord, and commence to beat up and down above the gorse, almost striking the dark green branches with their broad, softly-flapping wings, chasing the moths and beetles that the twilight similarly brings from their lurking places. Their singular cry during flight resembles the rattle of loose cog-wheels, but when at rest a churring noise is made, often so powerful as to cause the air around to vibrate. The Goatsucker

is a late summer migrant reaching Devonshire at the beginning of May, but farther north in Yorkshire we seldom hear of it before the middle of the month. Its two elongated, polished, and beautifully lined, veined, and marbled eggs are deposited upon the bare ground beneath a furze or other bush. Like most late migrants, the Goatsucker leaves us somewhat early in the autumn. In former days these Devonshire furze-clad warrens were apparently a favourite resort of the Stone Curlew during winter, but the reclamation of much waste ground, and the making of railways, have proved disastrous to them. We occasionally hear the once familiar cry of this species, seemingly uttered by birds on migration at night, but the Stone Curlew is decidedly rare now. The species was known to Montagu evidently as a straggler in the South Hams district; and there is no record of its ever having bred within the county, although, we believe, it regularly does so in Dorset. It seems to us extremely questionable whether the odd birds that appear in our area during winter are normal migrants at all. Rather should we feel disposed to class them as lost migrants that have drifted into a district where the exceptional

mildness of the climate renders winter residence possible, than as normal visitors. Precisely similar remarks may be applied to the Corn Crake, the Chiffchaff, and some few other species. We may also mention that occasionally a Short-eared Owl (sometimes several together) may be flushed from the gorse coverts in autumn, but as a rule this species shows more partiality for swampy ground, turnip fields, and rough pastures.

Garden and Orchard Bird-Life.



GOLDFINCHES AND NEST IN A DEVON ORCHARD.

CHAPTER II.

GARDEN AND ORCHARD BIRD-LIFE.

DEVONSHIRE is a land of gardens and orchards. It is true the jerry-builder, the arch destroyer of many a lovely spot, has left the mark of his presence here and there throughout the county, especially near the coast, where what a year or so ago was a sleepy country village buried in gardens and orchards has now become "a rising and fashionable watering-place," or with aspirations in that direction fondly cherished by the local magnates. Aided by the jerry-builder, the orchards disappear like magic, and "eligible residences" spring up mushroom-like with their few square yards of "gardens front and rear," changing the old-time paradise with its snug thatched cottage and acre or so of fruit-trees into a howling modernised waste. Fortunately such cases are exceptions, and Devon, we are glad to say, still

retains its unrivalled reputation for those gardens and orchards that prove so irresistibly attractive to bird-life in many forms. In many cases these gardens and orchards forcibly illustrate the fact that wherever suitable cover may be found, birds of many kinds are ready to take advantage of it, provided they are free from exceptional disturbance and molestation. The vicinity of houses does not appear to exert any unfavourable influence.

We will support our contention that birds—and some of the shyest species, too—readily avail themselves of the hospitality we offer them by a glance through the luxuriant gardens and pleasure-grounds of aristocratic Torquay. No other town in the kingdom occupies such a favourable site or is perhaps so completely enshrined in foliage. Its villa-studded hills are wooded literally to the water's edge, its streets are avenues of trees, its gardens and pleasure-grounds contain a wealth of vegetation, much of it perennially green and vigorous, and suited in every way to the requirements of that varied feathered army which occupies them.

Birds of the Crow tribe are much in evidence.

There are several extensive rookeries within the borough limits, and in more than one locality the birds have had long-established colonies in tall trees in some of the most frequented streets in the town. In some cases there are rookeries absolutely above the cab ranks; whilst many odd nests occur in gardens and pleasure-grounds throughout the place. The bird is on the increase, and almost every spring new situations are occupied. In this favoured spot where autumn and spring practically unite, the Rook is an exceptionally early breeder, and it is not unusual to see nest-building in progress during January. Another bird of the Crow tribe very much in evidence is the saucy Jackdaw. Torquay is a city of Jackdaws, tame and confiding as Sparrows, and equally as impudent. There are many colonies of Jackdaws in the various cliffs that are such a picturesque feature of the town; they occupy the church steeples, and the eaves and chimneys of the houses; whilst the several avenues of noble if somewhat storm-beaten lime-trees are the grand headquarters of many others. The observer with an experience of the Jackdaw obtained in other localities cannot fail to be impressed by the bird's

exceptional tameness and impudence. It may often be watched searching for food almost at arm's length, and is constantly robbing the Sparrows of bread and other scraps. There are few more lively and engaging birds, although we are sorry to say the crime of murder must be laid to his charge. We have seen a Jackdaw rob in succession three Sparrows' nests that were built under the eaves between the spout and the wall. The pillaging rascal clung, Woodpecker-like, to the masonry, tore the nests to pieces, and carried off the helpless young inside one at a time to feed its own offspring, the parent Sparrows meanwhile uttering loud cries of impotent rage. The Jackdaw mingles freely with the Rook and the Starling, and its aerial movements and loud cackling cries,—especially when a large flock is chattering in irregular chorus,—often in company with those species, are very interesting and enlivening. The Jay and the Magpie are by no means unfrequent visitors to the borough limits, but they are inherently shyer species, and often only betray their whereabouts by their harsh screams or discordant chatter. The beautiful pleasure-grounds—maintained almost in a state of

nature—of Chapel Hill, just above Torre Station, and containing some of the finest evergreen oak-trees in the kingdom, are a favourite resort of these birds ; and here too, we may mention that the squirrel is by no means uncommon. The Starling, as might possibly be expected, is common and universally distributed. If earlier records are trustworthy, however, this species has extended its breeding area to an enormous extent during the past fifty years. Everywhere it seems to be on the increase, a fact which is regarded by most gardeners with dismay. Within the limits of Torquay the gatherings of Starlings in the late summer months are sometimes enormous, and their regular movements most entertaining. Several recognised roosting places occur ; and in these at dusk the birds congregate in chattering hosts, keeping up their noisy converse more or less intermittently throughout the entire night. Such a vast concourse of Starlings usually occupies the low chestnut and oak trees in the grounds fronting Torre Abbey. The aerial movements of these flocks are beautiful and curious in the extreme, resembling the collapse and inflation of a huge balloon, or the spreading

of a gigantic net. Various shrubberies are also selected for roosting purposes. It is said that a hundred years ago the Starling did not breed in Devonshire at all; this seems doubtful, but at any rate the bird is now one of the most abundant and most widely distributed of native species.

No less than seven species of Finch may be met with more or less commonly in the gardens of Torquay, and all certainly breed within the limits of the town. The House Sparrow, of course, is ubiquitous. Torquay Sparrows are quite aristocratic in appearance, wonderfully clean and trim looking to the visitor from more grimy towns where the bird's plumage is never free from smoke. In the shrubberies the Bullfinch and the Greenfinch are fairly common, the latter particularly so; whilst the dainty Goldfinch is occasionally met with in the fruit gardens. The Chaffinch is perhaps the most widely dispersed, and his merry *pink pink* and bright, cheerful vernal song may be heard almost everywhere. In the more secluded grounds, especially in the vicinity of Daddy Hole, the Linnet's sweet little refrain may be heard. In winter occasional parties of Lesser Redpoles visit the gardens and

pleasure-grounds; and on one occasion, in our own experience, we had ample evidence to show that a pair nested amidst the luxuriant vegetation on the cliffs of the Rock Walk, above the town end of the Terrace Gardens. Both the Pied and the Yellow Wagtails are common birds within the limits of the town, the former as a resident, the latter as a passing migrant in spring and autumn. Not only may these dainty little birds be seen tripping over the lawns and seed beds near the villa residences, but they frequently visit the quieter roads, stable yards, and cab ranks. For several winters in succession, enormous numbers of Wagtails used to roost in a dense shrubbery of privet and laurel bushes in the Winter Gardens adjoining Torwood Street. My attention was drawn to these birds by my old friend Else, the late curator of the Museum at Torquay. Regularly every evening, just as dusk was falling, the Wagtails made their appearance, sometimes coming in twos and threes, at others in a scattered flock, and usually fluttering into the cover at once. They would continue to arrive even when darkness hid them from view; and it was most remarkable how few of the

many people passing at the time ever saw the birds. The cabmen on the other side of the street, however, were quite familiar with them, and used to take no small amount of interest in their movements. The Wagtails ceased to use the spot as a roosting place after the bushes had been trimmed. Another interesting little bird often seen in the well-timbered grounds is the Creeper. We have repeatedly watched this species clinging to the moss and ivy-grown walls at the sides of the more private roads, or deftly running up the trunks of the elm and lime trees; but like many another bird it is very apt to be overlooked. We have often remarked the expressions of surprise from residents in the town when we have told them that such species as the Creeper frequent their gardens and shrubberies. And yet a still shyer and more local bird may also be seen amongst them, and that is the Nuthatch. This engaging little bird is a by no means uncommon visitor in winter, coming quite close to the houses, and fraternising with Titmice, Wrens, and Creepers. Of the Titmice no less than five out of the seven British species are to be met with, the Blue and the

Coal Tits perhaps being the commonest. All these birds show little preference in their choice of locality, and the Blue Tit is almost as familiar round our residences as the Sparrow. In early spring, when these Titmice are exceptionally noisy, we can form the best estimate of their numbers and ubiquity. Another tiny dweller in the suburban shrubberies and pleasure-grounds is the Goldcrest. It loves the cover of the larch and fir, and rears its brood most unobtrusively and in many cases absolutely undetected.

In early spring, when the lime-trees and chestnuts are just bursting into leaf, the Chiff-chaff appears in the gardens and wooded grounds. From the closing days of March right through the summer its monotonous double note, which in some parts of Devonshire has gained for the species the name of "choice and cheap," may be heard almost everywhere. A week or so later the sweet-voiced Willow Wren arrives, and is almost equally common, its glad little song being quite a feature in the spring bird-life of this favoured spot. The Whitethroat, too, is a regular summer migrant to Torquay, frequenting the dense thickets and hedges, being specially

addicted to the luxuriant clumps of travellers'-joy; whilst the charming Blackcap, another migrant from the south, may be heard repeatedly singing with lusty voice, not only from the gardens and shrubberies, but from the branches of the higher trees. Three or four years ago Torquay was honoured by a visit of the Melodious Warbler, the *Hypolais polyglotta* of ornithologists. During most of the summer the magnificent singer took up its residence, and doubtless nested, in a sheltered valley between Upton and St. Marychurch, where nightly it poured forth such an unrivalled song that hundreds of people were drawn to the spot, and the bird was universally regarded by the press and the public as a Nightingale. But the songs of the two species are in reality very different, the constant repetition in that of the Warbler—resembling in this respect the notes of the Song Thrush—being one of the special points of distinction. The bird also repeatedly sang from the tops of trees, commencing its music shortly after dusk and continuing at intervals until just before dawn. This species has also recently been detected in Sussex, where it appears even to have bred.

Amongst the most prominent birds in this avine paradise must be ranked the three common British Thrushes. Of these the Song Thrush—universally known in South Devon as the “Grey-bird”—is perhaps the first favourite. In this neighbourhood the Song Thrush may justly be classed as a perennial songster, except during the moulting season in late summer. All the mild winter through the Greybird continues in voice; right through the spring and early summer, and again in the mellow autumn, his oft-repeated song sounds from almost every garden containing trees; and as likely as not this Thrush’s music is the first to greet the visitor as he steps out of the train into ever-verdant Torquay. In the stormier months of the year the wild music of the Missel Thrush gladdens the ear, but the bird is neither so plentiful nor so familiar as the preceding species. Although the largest of the British Thrushes, the present bird is perhaps the most overlooked, and we know his voice is very frequently confused with that of the Blackbird. In some parts of Torquay the Blackbird is decidedly the most abundant of the Thrush tribe; in others the

Song Thrush is as markedly in the ascendent. We do not hear much of the Blackbird's song before March; then the flute-like melody becomes one of the commonest bird songs in the district until the autumn moult, when it ceases finally for the winter. The great amount of evergreens in the gardens and pleasure-grounds, and the number of lawns, suit this species admirably, and its noisy *pink* or startling cry of alarm is one of the most familiar evening sounds on the hillsides. We heard of a remarkably early nest of the Blackbird, during the exceptionally mild winter of 1898-99. It was built in a hole in a wall covered with ivy, in a garden in the centre of Torquay, and on the 18th of February contained young birds. Allowing for the period of incubation, this nest must have been commenced in January. We, however, have never heard the Blackbird sing so early in the year as that; possibly this nest may have been the result of a songless union. We regret further to record that this nest was destroyed by the boys attending a neighbouring school. The familiar Robin is of course widely distributed over such a congenial spot for birds, and nests commonly enough in the

various grounds. His plaintive song, especially in autumn, when the last lingering leaves chase each other through the calm damp air, and the ground everywhere is strewn with the ruins of summer foliage, breathes hope and gladness over the fall of summer and ever seems to voice the prophecy of spring. The Hedge Accentor is equally widely distributed, and few indeed are the spots containing sufficient cover that do not harbour one or more. The same may be said of the Wren, another perennial songster. His glad carol may be often overlooked amongst the vocal abundance of spring and early summer, but in autumn and winter it stands clearly out, and is then particularly welcome and enjoyable. There are two other species that briefly call for passing mention. One of these is the Stonechat, a bird we have already met among the gorse, and which is occasionally seen in some of the wilder corners of the many pleasure-grounds. Only the other day we observed 1 pair of these birds on the wooded cliffs above the Terrace Gardens, but whether they breed there or not is difficult to determine. The other species is the Spotted Flycatcher. We could name various

spots in the borough where this species habitually nests, the favourite haunts being the more extensive grounds where the timber is well matured and adjoins open lawns and the like. Of Swallows and House Martins we have a goodly number within the town limits; in fact, these birds may be said to be fairly distributed over the entire district, the latter birds breeding not only under eaves and in corners of windows and so on, but on the cliffs. Even such a shy and retiring species as the Green Woodpecker finds a sanctuary amidst the trees of Torquay. Whether the bird absolutely breeds within the borough we are not prepared to say, but as a visitor to the various wooded grounds it is by no means uncommon, and its loud exclamatory note of *hi-hi-hi* is heard with sufficient frequency to render it familiar. Incidentally we may mention that there is a fine specimen of this Woodpecker in the Torquay Museum which killed itself by flying through a window of one of the houses in Torquay, some thirty years ago. All Woodpeckers, of course, are far more often heard than seen, but we may fairly say, so far as our experience extends, the Green Woodpecker courts concealment less in this imme-

diate neighbourhood than in any other with which we are acquainted. Springtime, of course, brings the Cuckoo to the wooded hills of Torquay, and its mellow note may be heard in most parts of the borough, especially in early morning. We have ample evidence to suggest that the Cuckoo actually breeds within the town limits; and several instances have come to our knowledge of young Cuckoos being fed by Hedge Sparrows and Wagtails in certain large gardens and grounds. The Swift, again, is a familiar visitor in spring, and nests not only in the crevices of the cliffs within a stone's-throw of the busiest parts of the town, but under eaves and in holes in thatch. The Kingfisher is a winter and autumn visitant to the rocky shores of Torquay. During the present winter (1898-99) several of these charming birds have frequented the piles of the Princess Pier, fishing from them in the morning hours. Two species of Owls are also resident within the town limits. In the neighbourhood of the avenues above the Devon rosery, and near Torre Station, to mention but a couple of localities, the Brown Owl may be heard hooting almost every evening during the breeding season. The Barn

Owl is not so common perhaps, but its wild unearthly screech, we are glad to say, may still be heard in the land. Old residents say that the Barn Owl was much more abundant in Torquay half-a-century ago, but many of its favourite haunts have been cleared away. We very frequently hear its voice late at night between Torquay and Paignton, and the bird still remains far from rare in the vicinity of Cockington. Of the Hawk tribe, the Kestrel may sometimes be seen hovering above the town, and may still possibly breed on the cliffs near Daddy Hole; whilst the Sparrowhawk pays frequent visits, and has been known to dash through drawing-room windows in its eager chase of the smaller birds. Lastly, we may briefly allude to the Pigeons. The Stock Dove may very frequently be seen, especially in the vicinity of Silver Hill, the Lincombes, and Daddy Hole; but by far the most familiar species is the Ring Dove. The bird is a well-known and by no means welcome visitor to most of the large gardens in the suburbs, and in some places is quite as tame as the Starlings and Thrushes, running about the lawns and perching fearlessly

in the trees just outside the windows. Here, as almost everywhere else, the Ring Dove has increased considerably in numbers during recent years; and left practically unmolested, in many cases even encouraged, there is every probability that these will continue to do so. In this brief survey of the garden bird-life of an exceptionally favoured spot we have omitted all mention of the birds frequenting the harbour and piers, and the fine range of sand stretching at low water round the road from the principal station to the town. In spring and autumn various Waders may be noticed on these sands between the tides, whilst Gannets, Gulls and Terns of various species, Cormorants, Divers, Guillemots, Razor-bills, and Puffins, may be watched upon or above the sea from the many seats placed for the comfort of visitors in the Terrace Gardens and elsewhere. Then during the migration period, in spring and autumn, at night especially, the notes of passing birds may be frequently heard as the flocks pass north or south, according to season, across the darkened sky. Perhaps not in every garden or assemblage of gardens and pleasure-grounds throughout the county

may such a varied assemblage of birds be found ; in some districts other species might occur : but sufficient, we think, has been said to indicate the avine wealth of the gardens of Devonshire.

The bird-life of the orchards may somewhat closely resemble that of the gardens in its general aspects, but we meet with a few additional species, and the shyer birds especially are more liberally represented. In no part of the kingdom are the orchards more genuinely picturesque ; the gnarled old fruit-trees are festooned with lichens and garnished with moss, the herbage is long and generous, the surrounding hedge-rows are literally thickets of trailing brambles and briars through which the growth of elm and sycamore and thorn often penetrates with difficulty. No wonder that such arboreal spots, little disturbed by man except during the fruit season, are the favoured haunt of birds. The bird-life of an orchard depends a good deal upon its general situation. Some orchards surround or adjoin cottages and farmsteads, others the highways and lanes, others yet again are situated in the fields, sometimes near to woods, and remote from houses or buildings. In some of these outlying orchards, Crows, Magpies, and Jays

may be found nesting, whilst the three British species of Woodpeckers frequent them. The Black and White Woodpeckers appear to be specially addicted to cherry orchards, doubtless owing to their strong partiality for fruit; whilst the Green Woodpecker seems most at home amongst the apple-trees, where an abundance of food can be found lurking amongst the lichen, and under the bark of the decayed trunks and branches. It is no unusual thing to flush this woodpecker from the ground in orchards, where it searches for ants, and we have even watched it overhauling the great heaps of apples (waiting to be carted off to the cider presses) in quest of grubs.

Some of these grand old Devon orchards are literally great aviaries of wild song-birds. To the contemplative lover of bird-life it is always a treat to enter one of these quiet shady nooks, to bury oneself amidst the blossom and greenery, and lazily recline on the bank of the hedge or amongst the tall rank grass under the trees, to listen to the chorus of song and cry, and to watch the movements of the feathered company around. With such surroundings existence is a pleasant

dream, and all the rough edges of life are for the time being gently brushed away. The birds will not require to be sought for; they will warble their joyous songs from the flower-flecked branches overhead, and live their happy lives either ignorant of your scrutiny or heedless of your presence. Perhaps music may appeal most forcibly to our sense of enjoyment first; and in truth there is no lack of it on this warm May morning. With the first glimpse of daybreak the Blackbirds and Thrushes commenced the glorious concert, and with the opening day bird after bird has been joining in the general melody. Here and there from the apple-trees the lusty voice of the Chaffinch greets the ear, whilst from the denser shade the twittering song of the Greenfinch and the full beautiful melody of the Blackcap mingle together by no means inharmoniously. But the most prominent musicians of the orchard are the Thrushes. All the winter through the Missel Thrush continues in finest voice, preferring to sit high up in the tall elms standing in the orchard hedge rather than on the lower fruit-trees. But unfortunately the Missel Thrush loses his voice in spring, and utters nothing but harsh grating cries

when other song-birds are overflowing with music. The Song Thrush, by the hour together, sits and sings his highly punctuated song, striving as it were to outnumber all other birds in the combination of his notes; whilst the Blackbird, fonder of the shade, runs over his few yet brilliant flute-like notes with a persistency that is sure to attract and retain attention. In the orchard hedge, where the brambles and briars are most densely interlaced, we hear the Bullfinches timorously piping to each other, and ever and anon their white backs show out conspicuously as one bird follows the other in waving flight down the hedge side. If we care to take the trouble and peer into the thicket, their rustic-looking nest with its five blue-spotted eggs may be inspected; but the hot sun and the calm repose of our surroundings are not conducive to exertion: the nest must wait, and we much prefer to remain here in musing mood to scan the gentle lovable little Creeper as he peers at us from behind a moss-grown trunk. We feel that the slightest movement on our part will break the spell and send him off in undulating flight amongst the trees. His restless activity captivates us, and our eyes follow his fly-like movements in starts and

pauses, this way and that, as he works up the trunk to the first thick branch which starts horizontally from the parent stem. Like a fly upon a ceiling, he runs out beneath it, and in corkscrew fashion examines it above and below; then flits back to the trunk, to which he seems to be drawn like a needle to a magnet; then on again to a neighbouring tree with a feeble chirp, where the same movements are gone through once more. No one can watch the Creeper long without being impressed with the resemblance of its plumage to the trunks and branches from which its food is drawn. This harmony of colour suggests a train of thought upon the philosophy of protective colouration; but this the reader may well be spared, a Devonshire orchard on a sweltering day in May not being at all conducive to such a discussion. Rather may we visit the nest of a Nuthatch, hidden away in the hollow trunk of an old apple-tree. As most observers may know, this engaging little bird possesses the curious habit of plastering up the entrance to its nest should the selected hole be too large for its requirements. The amount of plastering varies considerably. In the nest before us it has been carried on to an extent beyond all

precedent in our experience. The trunk of the tree is hollow almost from root to branch, and a fissure, varying in width from one to three inches, runs down one side of it for quite a couple of feet. This fissure can scarcely be detected, for the old Nuthatches have filled it up with clay throughout, leaving a nice round hole at the top for entrance. This site has been occupied for several years in succession, the plaster work being repaired each spring. At the bottom of the hole about a teacupful of bark flakes forms the nest in which the white eggs, spotted with reddish-brown, are laid. Curiously enough, this habit of plastering is by no means universally known to the country people; and we can specially recall the astonishment manifested by an old bird-catching friend of ours when the clay work in this particular nest was pointed out to him.

Orchards are the favourite breeding places of many hole-building species. The four commoner British species of Titmice may not unfrequently be noticed within the precincts of a good-sized orchard at the same time. The most abundant and widely dispersed is the familiar Blue Tit; next we should place the Great Tit; then the

Coal Tit; and last, for it is certainly the most local of all, the Marsh Tit. The Blue Tit is specially fond of nesting in a wall, and a favourite spot is amongst the masonry of the gateway to the orchard; the Great Tit is also partial to a wall, but as frequently selects a hole in an apple-tree. The Coal Tit shows preference for a gatepost or a hollow stump in the orchard hedge; and these situations are in favour with the Marsh Tit, too. The Redstart is a somewhat rare and local bird in the West Country, but odd pairs here and there frequent the orchards, breeding in holes of the fruit-trees and occasionally in walls. This species is perhaps the rarest in the district of the South Hams, although we notice it on passage about the wooded country between Churston and Brixham with fair regularity.

The hedges of the orchards are also favourite nesting places for birds. The Red-backed Shrike, the Garden Warbler, and the Whitethroats, the Greenfinch, the Hedge Sparrow, the Wren, and the Thrushes, all nest in abundance in them; whilst in some spots where the orchards are exceptionally dense and secluded, the handsome Jay rears its young. Occasionally rare birds are met with in

the orchards. On the 23rd of April 1891 I met with the only example of the Pied Flycatcher I have seen in the county, in an orchard near the quaint old church at Churston. It was a female, and remarkably tame, flying in little stages before me right down the lane, and always perching on the outermost twigs of the hedge. This example had evidently crossed the Channel with a great flight of small birds—Cuckoos, Redstarts, and Warblers—and been driven so far to the westward by a strong south-easterly gale that had been raging just previously. Another species rare in Devonshire, yet occasionally seen in the orchards, is the Wryneck. We have the record of the arrival of this species for two years in succession in the same orchard, close to Shorton, on the 2nd of April one spring, the 10th of April another. Whether the bird breeds in Devon we are not prepared to say, but as the species is so retiring and so chaste in colouration, rendering it liable to be overlooked, we strongly suspect that it may do so. Similarly, we may state that in our opinion the Lesser Whitethroat, a bird described as an accidental visitor only, breeds in the district of the South Hams.

We have often remarked, as a fact worthy of note, that the earliest pioneers of various migratory species are invariably met with in orchards or their immediate vicinity. We attribute this largely to the abundance of insect food lurking in such places. The first Chiffchaff of the year we may almost safely predict will be observed in the orchard; the same remarks apply to the Willow Wren and the Blackcap. Upon landing in our islands these birds appear to make straight for the orchards at once. In the same way, the odd examples of the Chiffchaff that we have known to pass the winter in the county have been met with in orchards. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that these birds have ever formed part of the normal avifauna of Devonshire. It is popularly supposed that these little laggards have been tempted to remain by the mildness of the climate and the abundance of food; but it seems to us that they are migrants out of their normal course, lost birds arrested in their southern flight by the, to them, unknown waters of the English Channel, and reluctantly compelled to take their chance and to brave the inclemencies of a northern winter. Possibly the number of

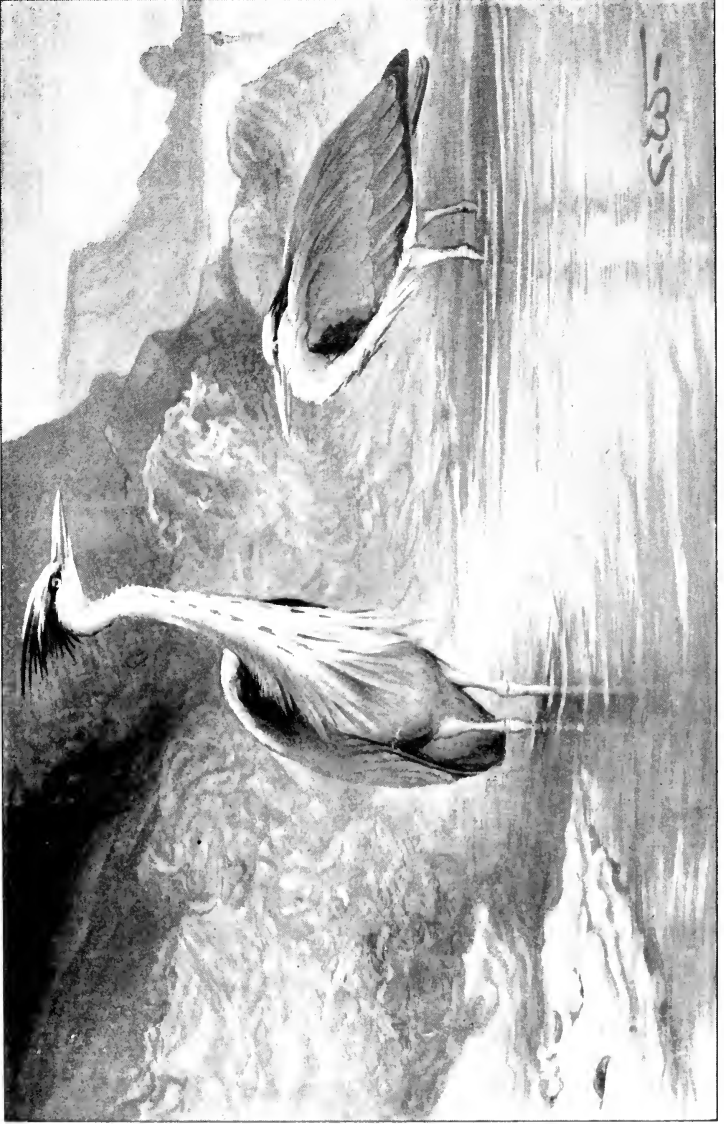
birds thus lost is much larger than is generally suspected, and only in very exceptional cases is the compulsory sojourn in our country during winter attended with success.

We may also mention that the ornithological attraction of the orchard or garden is by no means confined to the spring and summer months. In autumn and winter they are casually visited by large numbers of birds, many of them seen in our islands only during that season, as, for instance, Redwings and Fieldfares, Bramblings, Crossbills, and even Black Redstarts. Many times has a plump Woodcock or Snipe been flushed from the swampy corner of the orchard; whilst in severe weather Pheasants and Partridges, Moorhens, and even such unlikely birds as Herons, not only visit such places, but even seek a sanctuary in the garden.

It is interesting to remark that as the present volume was going through the press, Mr. F. B. Doveton, of Torquay, obligingly wrote to us, saying that he observed what he firmly believed to be a pair of Pine Grosbeaks at work on the cones of a Scotch fir in the Middle Warberry Road (in the centre of that town), on the 10th of January of

the current year. He described the length of the male as between seven and eight inches. Of course, as a scientific record this is a worthless one; and it is much to be regretted that the birds were not captured and their identity placed beyond doubt. As readers may be aware, the Pine Grosbeak is one of the rarest abnormal migrants to our islands; and of the many examples that have been recorded, not more than four or five are generally admitted to be genuine. Even these are not free from suspicion. A Devonshire example has been recorded, but the evidence is not trustworthy.

Bird-Life by River and Stream.



HERONS FISHING.

CHAPTER III.

BIRD-LIFE BY RIVER AND STREAM.

ALTHOUGH Devonshire is certainly a well-watered county, its rivers, especially in their upper reaches, are by no means impressive, and the streams are comparatively small and insignificant. But by way of compensation, some of the rivers, especially on the south coast, enter the sea by way of fiords which extend inland for miles, and are picturesque to a very high degree. One of the best examples of these is the far-famed Dart. Then, on the other hand, some rivers reach the coast across tracts of low-lying and flatter country, as, for instance, the Teign and the Exe, their banks within tidal limits presenting large areas of mud and sand at low water, and offering a congenial haunt to many species of wading birds. A brief notice of these, however, must be reserved for a future chapter.

Within tidal limits, Gulls (more especially Herring Gulls) are familiar objects upon these Devonshire rivers, and very frequently pass from one to another across the intervening country, or strike inland from the coast to their higher reaches. Above tidal water, these rivers generally become narrow and insignificant streams almost at once, so that the character of the bird-life upon their banks changes with equal suddenness. Take sleepy, red, old Totnes, for instance. Below the picturesque bridge that spans the river, the Dart is a wide and roomy waterway, crowded with boats, and upon which a tiny steamer plys to Dartmouth—with expansive tidal flats and hanging woodlands, with billowy, verdure-clad hills and lake-like reaches. Above the bridge, the river narrows quickly, and soon becomes a mere trout-stream, which dances and glides over a more or less rocky bed from the moorland plateau whence it derives its source. Below bridge, we have the haunt of Gull and Wader, of Grebe and Heron; above bridge, the home of the Grey Wagtail and the Dipper, and the favourite resort of the Summer Snipe and the Kingfisher. The Dart is but typical of many another Devonshire waterway, which rises amidst

the rocks and the sodden mist-swept inland plateaux, and retains its streamlet simplicity until the spacious fiord is reached by which it enters the open sea, and upon which in many cases vessels of the largest tonnage can ride in absolute security.

Of all these lovely stream-rivers it is the famous Dart that I am the most familiar with, a river, apart from its bird-life or any ornithological charm, that yields to no other English stream in interest and romance; for its blue and silver waters and hanging shores are inseparably associated with some of our greatest heroes of the sea. We need not stay to dilate upon such topics in a book of the present character, but memories of these bygone worthies and their mighty deeds that must endure for all time will crowd upon us as we take up the study of bird-life upon its shores and waters. The great wary Herons that unfold their ample wings and flap lazily along the quiet reaches, and the Gulls that penetrate from the open Channel up the wide expanse of waterway, hovering and circling above the blue waters, must have descended from ancestral birds that haunted the river when

Roman galleys furrowed its waters, when famous John Davis set sail upon his remarkable voyages of discovery, when Raleigh was a dweller upon its banks, or when news of the invading Spanish Armada swept up its green and winding valley. Very possibly the bird-life of the Dart valley was of a similar character in those far-off times to that existing there in our own day. Its most prominent characteristics may be briefly summarised as follows. Petrels are by no means uncommon at the mouth of the Dart, chiefly the smaller species, the *Procellaria pelagica* of ornithologists; whilst Gulls and Terns, the latter on spring and autumn passage, are more or less familiar objects. The Gulls wander up the river as far as tidal limits; and we have repeatedly seen Divers and Shags as high up the river as the old training-ship *Britannia*: in fact Divers, especially during winter, wander into the quiet reaches beyond Dittisham and Stoke Gabriel. It would be interesting to know whether any of these individuals reach such localities by flights across country from Tor Bay, where Divers are exceptionally numerous during some winters. In some of the quiet back waters, more especially

below Galmpton, the little Grebe is a fairly familiar species; whilst in winter the Great Crested Grebe may occasionally be met with. The banks of mud left bare each tide are resorted to by Waders of various species in spring and autumn, one of the commonest perhaps being the well-known Summer Snipe which breeds upon the adjoining moorlands; Sanderlings, Curlews, and Whimbrels are also tempted to alight upon them. The latter birds are marvellously regular in their migrations across the county, and their well-known cries, both in going to and returning from their northern breeding grounds, may be heard every spring and autumn almost to the hour as they speed across the night sky. The mudflats in the Dart valley are scarcely extensive enough to entice a very large number of wading birds; whilst the even more limited accommodation during flood-tide is another serious drawback to their assemblage. The county, however, is by no means wanting in accommodation for such species, as we hope to show in a future chapter. Perhaps the most favoured spots in the lower valley of the Dart for these kinds of birds is between Dittisham and Stoke Gabriel.

Here also the Heron is a familiar object, as persevering in his labours as the salmon-fishers themselves, whose tiny cottages, with their seine nets hanging up to dry around them, dot the banks at intervals. The Heron breeds in the woods upon the sloping hills that tower above the winding river about Sharpham, a spot from which the finest view of the lower Dart can be obtained. The heronry here is not a very extensive one (numbering but a score or so of nests), but the rookery is justly considered one of the finest in the county. These Sharpham Herons wander far and wide over the adjoining country, and are particularly fond of visiting the rocky shores of Tor Bay, arriving usually about high-tide and obtaining a meal as the waters recede. To our mind, the Heron is the most interesting avine ornament upon these lower reaches of the river, whether he be seen standing amongst the half-uncovered black rocks, draped and garnished with their olive-bladdered sea-weeds, or on the bare muds, where naught can give him shelter or conceal his stately form. Here the blue-grey fisher-bird, ever an object-lesson in the virtue of patience, pursues his search for food, wrapped

up in himself; and if disturbed by an approaching boat he leisurely unfolds his broad black wings and flaps away his checkered plumage, forming a pleasing contrast with the green overhanging woods or the grey and red expanses of mud. More tame and confiding, the snowy-breasted Gulls wheel and circle overhead, or drop downwards to the surface of the water to seize some tempting morsel; whilst at other times they may be descried at vast altitudes above the winding river, poised as it were with no conscious effort between earth and sky, or gliding along with intermittent wing-beats towards the hilly pastures or the more distant sea. And talking of Gulls and Herons reminds us of a fight we once witnessed between a Herring Gull and a Heron almost over Galmpton Bay on this self-same river Dart. From a note describing the strange battle just after it had taken place we may give the following particulars. It was on the morning of the 7th of May 1891. I had flushed a Heron from the rocky beach, and the big bird soared up into the air for several hundreds of feet, when a Herring Gull, for no apparent reason, dashed after it and began to buffet it most furiously.

The Heron, beyond swerving from side to side, took very little notice of the attack at first, but the Gull was evidently in a quarrelsome mood and determined not to let the challenge pass unnoticed. Then commenced a series of most interesting evolutions. The Gull had the advantage perhaps in manœuvring, but the Heron certainly excelled in absolute wing-power. The Heron, with neck drawn close in between the shoulders, managed very easily to keep above its antagonist; the Gull tried to deliver an attack from below, all the time endeavouring to secure the uppermost position. Every now and then the Gull flew for some distance away from the Heron, then the two would meet again with quick flappings of the wings, the swish of the Heron's pinions being distinctly audible from the ground below. All the time the Gull kept up an incessant querulous chatter, but the Heron never uttered a sound. And so the buffeting fight went on for several minutes above my head, until finally the two birds disappeared behind the tree-clad hills.

In the tidal reaches of the river the Kingfisher may sometimes be observed, either darting along

just above the water or the broad expanse of mud, or sitting motionless on some overhanging branch or water-surrounded post. The woods and dense vegetation which clothe the banks of the river literally down to the water's edge are chosen haunts of bird-life, but these are best dealt with elsewhere. Above tidal limits, the river, as we previously remarked, soon dwindles down to a mere stream. Here the Gulls are replaced by such more homely species as the dainty Grey Wagtail and the Dipper—two birds that are familiar enough to the trout-fisher, and attend him along each length of water with entrancing pertinacity. The Grey Wagtail is one of our special favourites, and one with which we have been familiar from boyhood. It is one of the most striking ornaments of those swift-flowing rivers and streams in the northern counties where our first knowledge of bird-life was acquired, and the sight of it amongst tamer surroundings in Devonshire never fails to create a train of reminiscences in which the dainty bird has taken a prominent place. The Grey Wagtail, however, is by no means so common in Devon as it is in Derbyshire and Yorkshire, for instance; and our experience of it in the south is that the

species is most abundant during autumn. We then often meet with it on more lowland streams, sometimes in small parties, at other times solitary. These individuals may not pass the winter in this part of South Devon. Another fact we have remarked in connection with this Wagtail, and that is its marked partiality for the smaller streams and rills, for pools and reservoirs, and in spring and autumn, the coast. It is perhaps more closely attached to the waterside than any other kindred British species, the character of its food being the probable explanation of the fact. We have met with this species breeding near the small streams at the source of the Dart, between Tavistock and Moreton Hampstead ; and have seen it in many localities, both on the coast and at varying distances inland, between the estuary of the Exe and Start Point. As in northern haunts, we have repeatedly seen this Wagtail perch in trees and bushes ; but its favourite resting-place is some large stone surrounded by the dancing waters of the stream. Here its dainty movements and somewhat showy plumage are seen to best advantage.

Whilst talking about Wagtails, we may take the opportunity of mentioning a rarer and more local

species, the White Wagtail, a bird which for the most part replaces the, to us, better known Pied Wagtail across the Channel. We have never remarked the White Wagtail far inland; but in spring and autumn it makes its appearance on the coast, especially in the vicinity of streams and springs. Sometimes the birds are mixed up with flocks of Pied Wagtails, at others they are in parties by themselves, more so in autumn, at which season young birds largely preponderate. During the present autumn (1898) parties of White Wagtails appeared in the meadows and on the coast of Tor Bay, and remained with us for several weeks. None seem to winter here, but the species appears again in spring. There are presumed instances on record of this Wagtail breeding in the county, but we have never had the good fortune to meet with a nest. Vast numbers of Pied Wagtails also congregate in similar localities, and their gatherings in spring and autumn cannot fail to be remarked by even the most casual observer. We have, in autumn especially, known the coast for miles to swarm with Wagtails, not only amongst the rocks and on the cliffs, but on the stretches of sand and

shingle, and in the wet meadows and osier-beds a little way inland. These large assemblies remain about Tor Bay for weeks, and many birds winter with us; but a considerable number eventually disappear, and may possibly move still more to the south-west. It is interesting to watch these Wagtails searching for food at the very edge of the sea, dodging the waves as they roll inshore, and actually mingling with Ringed Plovers, Sanderlings, and Dunlins. The same remarks, to a very great extent, apply to the Yellow Wagtail. This graceful and showy species is often very abundant, especially in spring, and may be met with in much the same localities. From time to time a large company of these Wagtails arrive and stay upon the coast for a week or more, crowding specially upon the headlands, preparatory to their flight across the Channel, or as if to rest and recruit in spring, ere passing north to the breeding grounds. There can be no doubt that the Yellow Wagtail breeds in the county, but rarely in the south. In the neighbourhood of Paignton the favourite resorts of these Wagtails are water meadows, and in these spots, which are rarely quite dry all through the year, we have on more

than one occasion seen four species at the same time, and all within a few yards of each other. It is perhaps needless to remark that these meadows are also a well-patronised resort of the Meadow Pipit, especially during the non-breeding season, when vast numbers come down from the moorlands to spend their winter in such food-abounding spots. In the higher reaches of the rivers and streams we may occasionally meet with the Dipper. So far as our experience extends we should feel disposed to class the Dipper as a rare bird in Devonshire, and one that, curiously enough, is sometimes met with in most unlikely spots, whilst in places apparently suited to it in every way one can search for it in vain. Judging from a lengthened northern experience of the Dipper—and we lived for twenty years amongst streams where it was our constant companion—we should assert that the waters, especially on the uplands, are eminently suited to its requirements. The evidence, however, seems to show that the Dipper was formerly more abundant than it is now (although we cannot trace a single local name for the species, which seems significant). The causes of its present scarcity, speaking

specially for South Devon, we are unable to suggest. We may, however, remark in passing that a very intelligent bird-catcher, with a thorough knowledge of all the commoner species, pointed out to us a small stream, little more than a ditch, that was frequented for several years by a pair of Dippers, and that was in the lowlands, and not more than half-a-dozen miles from the coast. He knew the bird well, described its habits and appearance most accurately, yet was unable to say whether it bred in the locality or not. Like the Kingfisher, the Dipper not unfrequently visits the coast, and has been seen amongst the rocks in Tor Bay and other places.

The luxuriant vegetation which clothes the banks of so many of these Devonshire streams, in some cases almost concealing them, forms an ideal shelter for the retiring Warblers; and one cannot help coming to the conclusion, whilst taking a rapid survey of these seclusive spots, that species hitherto unknown as regular visitors to the county may lurk amongst them. We have only to point to the nesting of the rare and excessively local Marsh Warbler (local, we fain would think, because it is overlooked) in Somerset, just over the

Devonshire borders (Taunton), to illustrate the force of these remarks. There are hundreds of streams in Devonshire the banks of which the ornithologist never treads, and many birds must of necessity escape the notice of a competent observer. Personally, we have little or no doubt that the Marsh Warbler breeds in Devon. It is true that the Reed Warbler is known as a casual wanderer only, though this is not due to any want of suitable cover, as some naturalists have suggested, but to laws of distribution and migration which it is not necessary to speak of here, beyond remarking that it is in the north of the county, say above Exeter, that the search for rare Warblers is most likely to lead to success. Then there is the case of the Melodious Warbler, which is not only a visitor to the county, but there can be little doubt occasionally breeds within its limits. Of this species we have already had something to say in our chapter upon bird-life in the gardens and orchards. The Sedge Warbler is by far the commonest species that haunts the dense vegetation by the stream or river side. This bird is in undisputed possession, and consequently thrives accordingly. We cannot bring to mind another locality in England where

this Warbler is so abundant as in many parts of Devonshire. Their numbers put one in mind of the Reed Warblers on certain reaches of the Thames, and in parts of Sussex. So regularly do these Sedge Birds return to certain spots, and so numerous are they, that they may fairly be called permanent colonies, and there are many of these colonies by the water-side in Devon. We are sorry to say, however, that within the past eight years drainage and building have sadly decreased the numbers of this interesting little bird in various parts of South Devon.

We have dealt hitherto chiefly with the swift-flowing streams, and those that enter the sea by way of more or less hilly and rocky fiords; but there are many others that find an outlet over level country presenting broad estuaries of sand and mud, and these within tidal limits possess certain avine characteristics. From the nature of the uplands whence they rise most of the Devonshire rivers are more or less turbulent in their upper reaches, but their course within tidal limits is subject to considerable diversity. This is admirably illustrated by two such rivers as the Dart and the Exe. The Dart winds down

between lofty hills and gorges to the English Channel ; the Exe flows sluggishly over wide and open country to the sea, its banks at low water presenting miles and miles of mud and marsh and salting, with many a treacherous bar and sandbank thrown in. The character of the bird-life changes accordingly, and, as might naturally be expected, the flat coast affords the greatest diversity so far as birds are concerned. A wide flat estuary seems always to be an ideal place for birds. That of the Exe appears to be specially favoured, for not only is it comparatively well sheltered, but it abounds in the favourite food of a great variety of species. Moreover, it is a place that seems specially attractive to rare birds wandering along our coast-line. Many species of Gulls and Terns congregate in this favoured spot, especially during the non-breeding season, and at the periods of spring and autumn migration. It is no uncommon sight, especially when small fish such as sprats are exceptionally plentiful, to see these birds congregating in thousands in this estuary. The Common and Arctic Terns may be regularly counted upon in this district during their passage, especially in autumn ; and in rough

weather they penetrate far up the river. The rare Caspian Tern, we believe, has been shot in this estuary. Less frequently, the dainty Black Tern makes its appearance. There is a sad interest attaching to the Black Tern, because it formerly bred in England. Whether even a pair do so now is open to question: certainly there is no direct evidence in support of it, whilst the last eggs of which we have any record were taken forty years ago (1858). Pairs of Black Terns still visit us, but whether intent on breeding within our area seems open to the gravest doubt. The Lesser Tern is seen more frequently, but the incessant persecution of the species has sadly reduced its numbers, and its breeding stations in our isles are few and far between. As with the other species, its visits are chiefly dependent upon stormy weather, the birds seeking the estuary for shelter. The Gull tribe is also well represented in these estuaries. During the non-breeding season the Kittiwake, the Common Gull, and the Black-headed Gull are common enough on the southern coasts, the latter especially, which linger with us until the early spring; then gales and stormy weather in autumn and winter drive in the two kinds of Black-backed

Gulls (neither of which, however, breed in the south of the county); whilst the Herring Gull—most ubiquitous of all—is always with us, and breeds in scattered colonies along the entire coast. The large arctic Gulls are also visitors to many of these noble estuaries during the late winter months; whilst the rare Sabine's Gull and the commoner Little Gull are both distinguished visitors, usually in immature dress. We may also mention that the only known British example of the Great Black-headed Gull was obtained off the estuary of the Exe some forty years ago (June 1859), and is still preserved in the Albert Memorial Museum at Exeter. The Pomarine and Richardson's Skuas are also periodical visitors to these southern estuaries. We need scarcely say that Herons, Cormorants, and Shags are particularly numerous in such fish-frequented spots. Cormorants penetrate far up some of these Devonshire rivers, certainly beyond tidal limits; but the Shag is more strictly maritime, and confines himself to the lower tidal waters. It is no uncommon sight to see large companies of Shags basking on the sea-encircled rocks at the mouths of these southern estuaries, or to catch glimpses of their

black forms as they hurry along just above the surface in strings to the fishing grounds, or the roosting places amongst the rock fissures. Less frequently, the Gannet may be watched fishing off the mouths of these wide southern rivers, but never penetrates up them from the sea, confining its visits to the large rocky bays and fiords that indent the coast. It is said that the Gannet formerly bred on the south coast of Devon, but this to us seems a more than doubtful assertion; as we need scarcely point out, the only nesting place in the county is on Lundy Island. Neither is it probable that birds from this centre wander round the Cornish coasts to the bays of South Devon, although in the non-breeding season the bird is by no means an unfamiliar one (conf. p. 256). The aversion of this species to cross even narrow strips of land is well known, so that we may safely infer that it reaches the southern coasts by a sea route only.

It is only to be expected that such pelagic birds as Petrels and Shearwaters rarely enter our estuaries—they require plenty of sea room, and it is stress of weather alone that drives them up the wide river mouths off the open sea. Nevertheless,

the Storm Petrel and the Fork-tailed Petrel are occasionally met with along such estuaries as the Exe, the Teign, and about Kingsbridge; whilst it is interesting to remark that an example of Wilson's Petrel was obtained in the vicinity of Exmouth. The Shearwaters equally keep to the open sea, but examples of the Manx species especially sometimes wander under the influence of gales up the mouths of the wide rivers. Geese are not so plentiful now in and about the Devonshire estuaries as they formerly were—a fact which is probably due to the increase of gunners, steamships, and railways. During winter, however, and more especially in wild rough weather, we have often a respectable number of these birds hanging about such spots as the estuaries of the Exe, the Teign, and the Avon between Salcombe and Kingsbridge. Of the Grey Geese, the White-fronted Goose is the most frequently observed, but even this species is rare, and during an eight years' residence on the coast we have met with but a single flock; odd birds only are chiefly seen. The last of these was a single bird at the head of the estuary of the Teign last winter. Brent Geese are, however, much more

plentiful; but even these birds prefer to lay well off the coast, especially during the daytime. Rough weather brings them coastwards, and at such times we often remark flocks of from a score to a hundred birds swimming in the unusually stormy water of the estuaries, or standing upon the mud and sandbanks. At such times the birds frequently come close inshore, as if perfectly well aware that no boat could venture out in chase of them. Swans are even less common objects on the Devonshire estuaries; and this is all the more strange when we bear in mind that large swanneries (Mute Swans) are in the vicinity. A year or so ago Mute Swans were observed on the Teign; whilst an occasional Wild Swan is seen. Returning to the Geese for a moment, it is interesting to remark that no less than two examples of that rare bird, the Red-breasted Goose, have been obtained, one in the estuary of the Exe, and the other a few miles lower down the coast in the marshes of the Teign. Neither can these estuaries be regarded nowadays as a great resort for Ducks. We must confess to feelings of disappointment in this direction, and the coasts of Devon seem

tame indeed, from a wild-fowler's point of view, in comparison with the famous haunts of fowl on the eastern coasts, where the experience of years is still retained as a pleasing memory. Our old friend the Sheldrake is a rare fowl indeed, notwithstanding the many suitable warrens and sand dunes, especially in the Exe district, where we might expect to find it common. Sheldrakes have from time to time been obtained on Dawlish warren in this area, and sometimes occur there during winter in exceptional numbers. It is said that the species breeds in this locality, and is on the increase—a very gratifying circumstance, for this Duck is quite the most handsome and striking in appearance of all the British species of the family. The Wild Duck is the commonest bird upon our Devonshire rivers, breeding on their banks in the higher reaches and often coming towards the coast districts during autumn and winter; the Teal is also a fairly common and well-known bird, especially during the wild-fowling season, about the lower waters and estuaries of the South Devon rivers. Few Teals nest in the county, but during the non-breeding season this pretty little Duck is a frequenter of the rivers and streams

and the marshy spots about their mouths. The Shoveller is rare, and a winter visitor only. Of all the non-diving Ducks the Wigeon is perhaps the most numerous, but its numbers vary considerably year by year. Large flocks of this Duck congregate off the various estuaries in autumn, coming inland at night to feed, and fairly good flight shooting may be obtained in some localities, the birds being remarkably regular in their movements. We know that this was the case years ago in the Teign estuary, but the birds are not so common as formerly. They arrive in September and continue in their usual haunts until the following March. Of the Diving Ducks the Scaup and the Tufted Duck are by far the best known, arriving in October and leaving in March or April. There can be little doubt, however, that the latter bird breeds within the limits of the county, but more of this anon (cf. p. 100). Both species haunt the estuaries, especially during prolonged rough weather. The Pochard is a winter visitor too, but much less common than the preceding species. It is also more prone to keeping out at sea, and is not so frequently seen about our estuaries. The same remarks apply to the

Golden-eye, although we have some evidence to suggest that this Duck was formerly much more abundant in Devonshire than is now the case, and perhaps of the two species it shows the most partiality for our tidal rivers. The Long-tailed Duck can only be regarded as a rare visitor to them. Eider Ducks are rare visitors indeed. We have never observed them, although many years ago immature birds were obtained in the estuary of the Exe. The Scoters, too, rarely visit these southern estuaries, although the Common Scoter is a well-known bird along the coast. These birds are *par excellence* Ducks of the open sea. Of the Mergansers we may mention the Goosander as an irregular visitor to the estuaries, sometimes in exceptional numbers; and to the Red-breasted Merganser very similar remarks may be applied. We have repeatedly seen the latter species fishing in the estuary of the Teign, and doubtless following the rocky coast round to Babbacombe and Tor Bay, where flocks are sometimes noticed. The Smew, known locally as the White Wigeon or White Nun, is the most river-haunting of all the Mergansers that visit us during the winter, entering the estuaries and in

some cases going up to tidal limits. Both kinds of river are frequented, such as the flat, shallow Teign or Exe, or the deep and hill-confined Dart. Many kinds of wading birds are to be met with in the vicinity of these southern estuaries during autumn, winter, and spring, but as these birds are more addicted to mudflats than to the water, we will reserve our account of them for a future chapter.

Bird-Life of
Lake, Swamp, and Reed Bed.



BIRD-LIFE AT SLAPTON LEY.

CHAPTER IV.

BIRD-LIFE OF LAKE, SWAMP, AND REED BED.

ALTHOUGH Devonshire cannot be regarded in any sense as a county of lakes, there are several very respectable sheets of fresh water—locally known as “Leys,”—whilst some of the rivers, notably the Dart, are so winding and land-locked as to resemble chains of lakes; then the broad estuaries often extending up country for miles are not unlike miniature lakes, or inland seas. Of swamps and reed beds the county, so well watered as it is, has its fair share. All these places are favoured haunts of birds, and can favourably compare with similar localities in other parts of the country.

One of the most remarkable of these fresh-water lakes is the far-famed Slapton Ley, situated in Start Bay, between Dartmouth and Start Point. It is one of the most interesting sheets of water

in the entire country, and justly famous from an ornithological point of view—one that is well worth repeated visits by every lover of birds. It consists of a long and narrow lake of fresh water running parallel with the coast, and separated from the sea only by a strip of sand and shingle about a couple of hundred yards in width. It is more than two miles in length, and considerably over two hundred acres in extent. Three small streams fall into it down the adjoining coombes, whilst there is no visible outfall to the sea. The western half of this curious lake is the deepest, the eastern portion being greatly overgrown with reeds, which are regularly cut and harvested, and used principally for thatching purposes. There are, however, several reed and rush beds on the margin of the deeper portions. The ley teems with various coarse fish, especially perch, pike, and eels, and the hotel situated near the centre of the long stretch of sand is a great resort of the angling fraternity. Being carefully preserved by the owner or lessee, and offering not only abundance of cover but great seclusion, there can be little wonder that the ley is a favoured resort of many

shy birds. Perhaps its most characteristic bird is the Coot. From time immemorial Slapton Ley has been famous for its Coots. Besides the resident Coots that are so numerous as sometimes to blacken parts of the water with their massed numbers, a great many others visit the ley during winter, especially after severe weather, and remain there until the following spring. Formerly an annual winter shoot, open to every gunner who cared to join in the sport, took place; but nowadays more conservative conditions prevail, and the grand battues are few and far between. One of the more recent of these shoots resulted in bagging close upon a couple of thousand Coots in a single day, and there can be little doubt that the majority of the birds escaped out to sea. A visit to the ley either in summer or winter is equally interesting to the lover of bird-life. In spring, when the young reeds are not yet sufficiently high to conceal the birds, many a delightful little glimpse can be got of their ways. The Coots are everywhere—dotted about the water in pairs or little parties, swimming hither and thither, their white frontal shields gleaming in the sunlight, and

their harsh twanging note sounding at intervals from near and far. Others may be watched gracefully walking about the banks, daintily picking here and there, or stealthily running towards the water as we approach them. The scene here becomes specially animated when the broods are hatched, and the surface of the water is sprinkled in all directions with the tiny balls of black down that represent the young chicks. Their gambols and movements are most amusing as they swim and dive, attended by their parents. Many hundreds of these chicks must fall victims to the voracious pike, with which the ley is plentifully stocked. Then by way of variety, especially in early spring, pairs of Mallards may be seen here and there floating amongst the short spear-like reeds or in the open water far from shore; whilst still more frequently an old drake swims about by himself, or rises with startling haste almost from our feet, the ducks being hidden away upon their nests. Here and there, also, a drake Tufted Duck may be observed. This species is a common visitor to the ley in winter, and there can be little or no doubt that a few pairs remain to

breed. I have seen several Tufted Ducks on the ley as late as the 19th of April (1892); and I was assured by persons who were in every way competent to know, that the bird not only frequented the ley all the summer, but that it nested there. The same remarks apply likewise to the Teal. I have also seen the Wigeon on this water equally late in the spring, and was assured that odd birds occasionally remained in its vicinity during the summer. Reports were current in the neighbourhood that this Duck has bred on the ley, but as I could ascertain nothing sufficiently definite, I think the assertion may safely be discredited. Very pretty do these wild-fowl look floating on the comparatively bare waters, and it is most interesting to watch the movements of the several species. If discovered inshore the birds soon swim out into the open lake, and there one may see the Tufted Ducks and Coots diving in quest of food; while in the shallower water the Wild Duck and the Wigeon poke about with one half of the body under the surface, the other half pointing upwards to the sky, and feet all the time paddling quickly to assist in maintaining the undignified position.

Now and then a Duck comes up at full speed and with flapping wings drops into the lake; others rise at intervals to seek new quarters; others sit and preen their feathers, or with head tucked in amongst their plumage enjoy a safe and undisturbed siesta. Odd Herons may frequently be flushed from quiet shallow corners of the ley, tempted thither by the abundance of food, whilst the shy Water Rail finds a sanctuary amongst the reeds and rushes, and other coarse vegetation of the shore.

When the reeds attain their full growth, a shelter of the densest kind is furnished to the birds frequenting Slapton Ley. And now who shall say with certainty what bird does or does not find a haunt in such a secluded spot? More than once I have been assured that the Bearded Titmouse frequents these dense waving reed forests on the eastern portions of the ley: a local resident, evidently well acquainted with the bird-life there, strongly asserted that this species dwelt amongst the reeds, and his description of it was most exact and precise; but we could never find a trace of this species in the locality, and we have been there at all seasons.

Then there is the Reed Warbler. The late Mr. Gurney positively stated that he not only saw several of these birds at Slapton in May, but that he heard them frequently throughout that month. Mr. Gurney was too competent an observer to be easily mistaken, as all who knew him will at once assert; whilst so recently as the preceding summer (1898) I was confidently assured by two young naturalists, who appeared to be quite familiar with the species, that the Reed Warbler was certainly to be found at Slapton. Again we must remark that the bird has never come under our notice there, but this of course is negative evidence only. Possibly the Marsh Warbler may have been the species seen; but if the Reed Warbler does actually visit South Devon, all our previous ideas respecting its distribution in the West of England will have to be modified. The Sedge Warbler, however, is common enough in the fringe of vegetation all round the ley, and its varied song is one of the most characteristic of the place, both by day and by night. Another bird by no means uncommon in the neighbourhood, although often overlooked, is the pretty Reed Bunting. We have

special cause to mention this species here, because a pair of these Buntings were the first birds we detected when making our acquaintance with Slapton Ley seven years ago, as we approached the water-side from the east or Dartmouth. They were most obtrusive, flitting from one perch to another, and keeping before us for a long way until they finally went off in a dipping flight across the lake. It is almost needless to say that Gulls may often be seen above this sheet of water, and that round its banks Plovers and Sandpipers often congregate. The Little Grebe also frequents the ley.

In autumn and winter the number of birds upon Slapton Ley largely increases. During a favourable season Ducks of various species pour in from the north and east, and sometimes Swans descend upon its ample expanse of water. One of the most abundant of the Duck tribe is the Wigeon, and in lesser numbers Tufted Ducks and Scaups, Pochards, Mallards, Golden-eyes, and Teals. Less frequently the Smew is seen; whilst at this season a vast influx of Coots often occurs. The brown sighing reeds now no longer echo with the Sedge Bird's melody as they did in their early

summer greenery, but they are tenanted with larger and shyer fowl, and the whole place is replete with an animation totally different from its summer aspects of dreamy peace. As the short days close in and night falls quickly over sea and land the fowl become more lively and considerable movement takes place, the birds often going for long distances to feed. Among these usual winter frequenters of the lake many a rare bird has been from time to time detected. Even a mere list of the bird rarities that have been observed either on the actual ley itself or in the immediate vicinity is enough to fill the average collector of such specimens with envy. We can fairly compare it with the still more famous island of Heligoland, which the researches of Gätke have made so famous; and possibly no other spot of the same size in the British Islands can boast such a record of abnormal avine visitors. Of the *Passeres* we may mention the pair of Crested Larks seen by the late Lord Lilford; of other families may be noted the Honey Buzzard, the Osprey, the Bittern (sometimes in exceptionally large numbers), the White Stork, the Spoonbill, the Glossy Ibis, the Bean Goose

(a rare bird in Devonshire), the Gadwall (also rare in that county), the White-eyed Duck, the Surf Scoter, Pallas's Sand Grouse, the Black-winged Stilt, the Black-throated Diver, the Red-necked Grebe, and the Sclavonian Grebe—a remarkable list truly when we bear in mind the comparatively small area of the locality. Many of these birds have occurred more than once on the ley, a coincidence that in some cases seems most extraordinary. We can well understand how the attraction of a suitable resting-place may exert a strong influence in such fairly common visitors to our islands as Ospreys, Bitterns, and Red-necked Grebes; but when we come to such a species as the White-eyed Duck or the White Stork, their repeated visits seem to suggest something more than a mere coincidence. Other naturalists have often remarked the same thing. Mr. J. A. Harvie-Brown, for instance, says how curious it is to find examples of rare American and Eastern Palæarctic species occurring so frequently on a line between the Forth and the Clyde. Then we have the case of the two Devonshire examples of the Rufous Warbler occurring in the same district, but at

an interval of seventeen years; or the two specimens of the Red-breasted Goose (the only two the county can boast) within a mile or so of each other, but with an interval of nine years between them; and lastly, the two Rose-coloured Pastors (a male and a female) shot on Berry Head, with an interval of six years between them. In other parts of the country we may instance the remarkable number of Tawny Pipits that has been secured in the immediate neighbourhood of Brighton, and the oft-repeated visits of the Serin Finch to the same locality. The migrational coincidences of Heligoland are even more interesting, but in the present state of our knowledge of the subject it is more than difficult to assign a cause.

Notwithstanding the hilly nature of the country, Devonshire is fairly well supplied with marshes and swampy ground, especially in the vicinity of the coast. With the salt-water marshes we do not propose here to deal, reserving them for a future chapter dealing with bird-life along the shore. One of the most characteristic marsh birds of Devon is the Lapwing. There are few marshy tracts of any size where this the handsomest of our native Plovers does not occur, and often in numbers most

imposing. During the breeding season the bird is much more local than throughout the rest of the year; but so far as our experience goes, this species prefers wet land and uncultivated marsh for nesting purposes rather than dry open fallows, as is so often the case in the North of England. The Lapwing is most in evidence in my own particular district during summer. Here, especially after snowstorms higher up the country, the birds sometimes congregate upon the wet meadows and marshy grounds, where snow rarely remains long, in large compact flocks, Rooks, Starlings, and Gulls mingling with them. These large flocks seldom remain after the weather moderates. Another bird fond of marshy ground is the Starling. Vast flocks of these birds congregate in the wet meadows, and are also partial to roosting in reed and osier beds. The Starling's regularity of movement is most interesting. Several winters ago a flock of perhaps a hundred birds used to roost in an osier bed close to my residence, and for many weeks in succession this company of Starlings passed by with scarcely a minute's variation evening after evening to the accustomed sleeping place. We

may remark in passing that the Starling frequents the extensive reed-beds at Slapton Ley for roosting purposes. Here the flocks are sometimes of enormous proportions, largely composed, we are inclined to think, of migrants from the north-east. The aerial evolutions of these dense flocks as they prepare to descend into the reeds, and their noisy clamour when finally settled, or the rush of their wings as they rise into the air again if disturbed, combine to make a scene of exceptional interest. These marshy osier beds have also a population of more or less resident birds. One little species very partial to them in this part of Devonshire, at all events, is the Stonechat. He lives in pairs throughout the year, and makes himself a very conspicuous object as he poises himself upon some swaying willow wand or tall weed. His mate is far more retiring, less showy, but usually keeps her mate close company. These birds are particularly active and noisy when their nest is threatened or they are disturbed with their young. Then we have the harsh-voiced Corn Crake during spring and summer lurking in these places too; but he is a bird of very capricious appearance, and some seasons scarcely

one is heard, whilst at other times every swamp and meadow resounds with his rasping cry. Talking of Corn Crakes reminds me of a somewhat peculiar incident. Whilst standing one autumn evening on the platform of Churston Station just as dusk was falling, we were startled by a great commotion amongst the telegraph wires. The rattling vibration sounded almost like an approaching train. Looking up, we were just in time to catch a glimpse of several large birds disappearing in the gloom, and in a moment the secret of the disturbance was apparent. A covey of Partridges had gone bang through the wires, leaving several dead upon the ground below. But the most curious thing was that a Corn Crane must have been flying with the Partridges, and came to grief against the wires. I examined this bird just after it was picked up by one of the porters, and was surprised to find one of its wings cut off as cleanly as if it had been amputated with a knife. The bird, of course, was quite dead. This is the first and only instance I have known of Corn Crakes consorting with Partridges in such a manner. Another bird we often meet with in the Devonshire marshes in autumn is the Short-eared

Owl. It is a winter migrant to the county, but irregular in appearance, sometimes being common and widely dispersed, at others scarce and local. We have sometimes flushed several of these Owls from one spot amongst coarse grass and rushes in the swamps close by the sea. On the east coast of England, where this bird is known locally as the "Woodcock Owl," we have flushed as many as a score one after the other in half as many yards. This Owl arrives in Devonshire during the last half of October, and leaves us again in March. Another marsh bird of Devon is the Water Rail. Perhaps no other bird in the county is more overlooked or considered rarer than it really is. Few birds are so skulking in their habits. It rarely shows itself, except in the gloom of evening or when accidentally flushed. It is a denizen of many a marshy meadow and osier bed, though quite unsuspected by the ordinary observer. In winter, when the cover in many of these places becomes much less dense or even dies down altogether, we have known this Rail resort to hedgerows and the ditches below them. It is also frequently to be met with in the swampy corners of worked-out brick-fields and clay pits. We often

hear the note of this Rail at night as the bird flies to and fro about the air, as if serenading its mate. It is an early breeder, the nest being ready for eggs very early in April. The nest of the "Skiddy Cock," as the bird is locally known, is one of the most difficult to find, the parents rarely contributing to its discovery by their actions. The Spotted Crake does not appear to breed anywhere in Devonshire, although there are so many localities seemingly suited to its requirements. We know it as passing us on migration only, still there seems little doubt that a few birds remain to winter in the county, and we should not be at all surprised to hear of the discovery of its nest within our limits. October brings us the Woodcock. It is true a comparatively insignificant number of these birds breed in the county, but Devon is a specially favourite resort of the species during winter. Its freedom from long-continued frosts, and the mild humid conditions prevailing especially in the south, make the county *par excellence* a Woodcock haunt. We shall have occasion to allude to this species in a future chapter (cf. p. 174), but we introduce it here in order to say that during snowy weather we have not unfrequently flushed it from the osier beds and

springs in the marshy meadows close to the sea; and in such spots several "cocks" will sometimes rise almost simultaneously. The Woodcock normally is a solitary bird, frosts generally accounting for its apparent gregarious tendencies. From the above remarks it may be gathered that Devon also ranks high as a Snipe county. The Common Snipe we have with us in small numbers all the summer, the bird breeding somewhat sparingly in all suitable districts throughout the county. In autumn the foreign contingent arrive, and these, during frosty weather especially, resort in great numbers to the marshy lands and wet meadows. The favourite resorts are on the margins of bogs and in rough unenclosed land where the ground is spongy and studded with tufts of rushes and coarse grass. These birds, and Woodcocks too, must move about a good deal during the winter, for in some spots as soon as one lot of birds is killed others promptly occupy the vacant haunts. The Jack Snipe, of course, is known as a winter visitor only. He is nothing near so fastidious in the choice of a haunt as the Common Snipe, and may often be flushed from the ditches or a square yard or so of bog, to which, by the way, if left unmolested, he will return

with unerring certainty each succeeding winter. This Snipe is particularly attached to a favourite haunt, no matter how small the spot may be, and when flushed and driven from it will always return at the first possible opportunity. It is worthy of remark that this Snipe does not breed within our area, being a migrant to Lapland and other northern regions during summer. During autumn and winter our marshes are the resort of fair numbers of Curlews, which retire to these spots when the flowing tide drives them from the sands and mudflats where they feed.

Round about Tor Bay there are many small reed beds and dense patches of yellow iris and rush. These afford excellent cover for the Sedge Warbler, a bird that is remarkably numerous in this particular part of the county. This species affords a capital instance of the deep attachment birds have for a certain haunt, and how reluctantly they seem to desert it, notwithstanding changes that may alter the entire aspect of the place. Eight years ago Sedge Warblers abounded in a small swamp clothed with a dense growth of reeds and iris, amongst which a few willows struggled hard to survive. Several years ago a

new road was made along a portion of this reed bed, but the Sedge Warblers return as usual, even though every season the road becomes busier with human traffic, and many houses have been built. One end of this marsh is being rapidly filled up with all sorts of rubbish and refuse, with a view to more house-building, and yet summer after summer the little brown-coated Warblers appear and make the best of things. All through the summer nights their varied songs may be heard amidst the noise of traffic, and unsilenced by the passers-by; and there can be little if any doubt the birds will return to the old familiar breeding place as long as sufficient cover remains standing. In the autumn and winter Finches of various kinds resort to these reed beds in quest of the seeds, and not unfrequently we have detected Goldfinches and Tree Sparrows amongst them. The latter birds visit us during winter in small flocks, but somewhat irregularly. Two winters ago a party of a dozen practically lived on the border of the reed bed described above, obtaining almost all their food upon a waste bit of ground but a few yards square, which was overgrown with docks, plantain, and groundsel. These birds were

exceptionally tame, and we have often stood and observed their movements within half-a-dozen paces. Occasionally they would be joined with a few Redpoles, Linnets, Greenfinches, and Yellow Buntings; while now and then a Cirl Bunting or a pair of Goldfinches would visit the attractive spot. The Tree Sparrows, we noticed, however always kept to themselves, and when disturbed went off in a twittering compact party to the nearest trees. The marshy meadow adjoining this reed bed is also a favourite haunt of Wagtails during winter and the two seasons of passage. In autumn especially large flocks arrive in September, and the reed and osier beds near by are chosen roosting places. I sometimes stand and watch these pretty, graceful birds arrive in scattered parties, and in ones and twos, and drop into the friendly shelter. They are late birds to roost, and belated stragglers may be seen or heard when the gloom of night is settling fast. Then all the year round we have large numbers of Starlings, which evidently find this meadow abounding with food. In spring and summer they search it in scattered order for food for their young that are being reared under the eaves of

neighbouring houses ; in autumn and winter they resort thereto in compact bunches, their evolutions often being of a most interesting character. The Jackdaw is also a familiar visitor. For two years now a bird of this species has frequented the spot to feed, remarkable for having one of its legs always hanging down stiff and useless. It is astonishing how Nature left to herself will heal many a wound and repair many a fracture ; and also how the maimed individual will contrive to exist under such disadvantageous conditions. So long as the damaged part does not interfere with obtaining food, the unfortunate individual appears to lead as happy a life as its companions. For some time past (we have observed it all through the present summer) a female Sparrow with one leg has frequented Torquay railway station. We have repeatedly watched this bird hopping (hopping literally as we humans best understand the action) about the platform in quest of crumbs ; we have seen it chase and capture bees and flies under the glass roof that covers the platforms ; while more interesting still, we saw it feeding a couple of young birds just able to fly, each of them of course blessed with the normal

number of legs. A Starling with one foot missing has visited my back garden for several winters—a strong, vigorous fellow too, able to take his own part and obtain a full share of the food spread specially for my bird guests. There are many similar instances of crippled birds on record.

Speaking of the legs of birds brings up a question in which we have taken considerable interest, and that is the position in which they are held during flight in the various species. This may seem a simple matter, yet it is one in which not only great ignorance amongst ordinary people prevails, but considerable diversity of opinion amongst experts too. We may be mistaken, but we have some dim remembrance of reading somewhere that the legs of all birds are held under the tail, or pointing astern, during flight, and that pictures of birds on the wing showing the legs held in any other position are wrongly drawn. In the first place it is well to remember that the greatest difficulty is experienced in deciding the question one way or the other, especially amongst the Passeres. Their movements in the air are very rapid, the legs are short and concealed at once amongst the plumage,

and in alighting the legs are brought down so quickly that it is next to impossible, under any ordinary circumstances, to detect the exact position in which they had been carried. These remarks apply of course to normal flight, and not to hovering or fluttering movements, when the legs of most species are dropped, as if the feet were preparing to seize some perching place. Most readers may be aware that such birds as Herons carry their long legs astern, for they can be very plainly seen projecting far beyond the tail; but much less certainty of opinion would be expressed if the short-legged birds formed the object of discussion. In such short-legged birds as Gulls and Gannets it is easy to remark the legs pointing backwards during flight, often tucked completely out of sight amongst the plumage of the vent and the under tail-coverts. These birds often fly slowly and hover above the head of the observer, so that the fact may readily be remarked. Then, too, some of the long-legged Waders (the Godwits are a capital example) show their legs and feet projecting beyond the tail during flight. But beyond these limits an ordinary observer would not, perhaps, be prepared to go. So far as our

own observations extend,—and we have never missed a chance of learning something at every possible opportunity,—we are inclined to the opinion that, so far as British birds are concerned, and the groups of which those species may be regarded as representative, all birds, with the exception of the Passeres, carry their legs during normal flight beneath the tail or pointing astern. The other day we had a capital opportunity of observing a Kestrel through a powerful binocular. The bird was hovering directly overhead, and several times the legs were dropped as if preparatory to a swoop downwards. Each time the legs, without any possibility of the slightest doubt, were brought from behind and under the tail. Birds of prey, however, at the actual moment of striking bring their legs forward, as we have repeatedly observed in the case of the Sparrow Hawk. On the other hand, we have never yet come across an instance suggesting that any Passerine species carried the legs during flight otherwise than forward, concealed under the plumage of the belly and flanks. We have had several exceptional opportunities of confirming this statement so far as it concerns Rooks, Jack-

daws, Starlings, and Sparrows. We have carefully watched these birds alight—in the case of the Rooks and Jackdaws, through a glass as well as with the unassisted eye—and we have repeatedly assured ourselves that the legs were carried forward, after seeing the birds alight and take wing. Starlings and Sparrows, times without number, we have watched bring down their legs and feet from the plumage of the belly as the birds alighted on a tall chimney, below which we could see everything without being seen. Then we have seen such species as Wagtails, Finches, and Thrushes under circumstances that admitted of no doubt as to the actual facts. The subject is by no means exhausted yet, and is one, in the face of much diversity of opinion, that offers a very interesting opening for original research. It is one which, we are sorry to say, receives but little attention from the majority of our bird artists and draughtsmen. Neither does the taxidermist pay much attention to the matter. Birds are either drawn or mounted with the legs depicted or placed just as the whim of the artist or the stuffer may dictate; and yet it is this close fidelity to detail that makes or mars a picture

or a mounted specimen. To a very great extent the old-time cabinet naturalist has been superseded by the open-air observer, with the inevitable result that endless errors and fables respecting the habits of birds have been swept away. It was a cabinet fable that the long-legged Flamingo sat astride its cone-like nest. The field naturalist taught us the truth, although the fiction, as is generally the case, died hard. It would seem that the natural deportment of birds is surrounded with similar ignorance, and this only the field naturalist, with his binocular and camera, and his patient and persistent observation, will be able in time to dispel.

Bird-Life in Field and Hedgerow.



RED-BACKED SHRIKE. — TORQUAY.

CHAPTER V.

BIRD-LIFE IN FIELD AND HEDGEROW.

THE abundance of small birds in Devonshire can be largely attributed to the exceptional quantity of cover of all kinds. The luxuriance of vegetation in this favoured south-western county is proverbial, the mild equable climate and the humid conditions producing an excess of verdure. Nowhere in the country are the fields greener (we had almost said as green), the hedgerows more dense and luxuriant. Devonshire is essentially a grazing county—a vast chess-board of green pastures and red earth fields, threaded by an endless maze of secluded lanes, and marked off from one another by hedgerows so dense and matted and luxuriant as to form unrivalled retreats and nesting places for birds. In summer these fields^s and hedgerows^l abound with a migrant population, while in

winter resident species in great diversity mingle in them with many birds from more northern haunts. We have often remarked, however, that in Devonshire, as elsewhere, the more elevated fields and exposed hedgerows are not so thickly populated with birds as those on the lower and more sheltered lands ; while, on the other hand, some species show a decided preference for the elevated districts. We could not better illustrate this remark than by alluding to the distribution of the Sky-Lark in the county. Everywhere this bird prefers an elevated pasture ; this explains the comparative abundance of the Sky-Lark on the central plateau and its relative sparse distribution on the lower lands. In the district of the South Hams, for instance, the song of the Sky-Lark is familiar enough of course, as the little brown singer hangs between earth and sky, but the bird is not what we should call common, and invariably nests on the hill-top fields. In winter the bird becomes more numerous on these lower lands, and flocks frequent some of the fields on the summits of the cliffs and the more exposed stubbles ; the central plateau is almost deserted during severe winters, and then, in these ex-

ceptional cases, the bird is seen in some abundance. Small parties of Wood-Larks are also fairly regular visitors to the lower fields during winter. The story may be worth repeating here that Sky-Larks, during the winter of 1645-46, appeared in Exeter in "multitudes like Quails in the wilderness," as quaint Fuller records in his *History of English Worthies*, while the city was besieged by the Parliamentary forces, the birds forming a welcome and unexpected supply of food to the beleaguered dwellers in the Ever Faithful city. Be all this as it may, Sky-Larks are rarely, if ever, seen in such vast numbers in Devonshire as they are every autumn on the east coast of England. Buff varieties of the Sky-Lark are sometimes seen in this part of Devonshire. One of the most interesting birds to be met with in this part of the county is the Cirl Bunting. As many readers may know, this species was first discovered to be a British bird in Devonshire; and it was in the South Hams district that Montagu detected it, now almost exactly a century ago. This pretty bird will always remain closely associated with that famous old-time ornithologist, who in Devonshire

made not a few of the important discoveries which made his name famous in the annals of our favourite science, and keep his memory green. There is one thing about this species which we can never quite understand, and that is the way in which so many writers speak of its comparative rarity in the county. In one of the most recent works on the ornithology of Devon, we are informed that this Bunting has frequently been obtained at Torquay. One would naturally infer from this that the Cirl Bunting is scarce in the neighbourhood of Tor Bay. This is not the case, and in many localities round here the bird is so often seen that its appearance calls for no record. On the higher ground round Marlton, and between that village and Berry Pomeroy, this Bunting is quite as common as *Emberiza citrinella*, with which it closely fraternises during winter. We have repeatedly met with flocks of Cirl Buntings near farmsteads and ricks in the fields; it is one of the most familiar species in the hedgerow-trees hereabouts; while it actually breeds almost as commonly as the Yellow Bunting not a mile from our present residence. We have known this past summer

four distinct pairs breeding in the fields, within eight minutes' walk of the centre of Paignton, and are so familiar with the bird and its characteristic note, that we never regard either one or the other with any special attention. It is a bird that may be very easily overlooked, especially during summer, when the trees and hedgerows are thick with foliage; but in winter, when the branches are bare and leafless, it readily comes under the notice of any one competent to identify it. Several winters ago, during long-continued frost and snow, the Cirl Bunting came on several occasions to pick up seed scattered in our back-garden. We have never noticed anything to suggest an arrival of migrant Cirl Buntings in the county; and indeed the extra British range of the species is such that we should not expect to do so. Like the Sky-Lark, this Bunting is fond of high ground, though by no means exclusively so.

Our hedgerows are also a paradise for Titmice. All the common British species frequent them; and it is no rare thing to see three or four species practically in company. We ascribe the abundance of these birds to the plentiful food-supply

obtainable in the grand old orchards, in which the fruit-trees are old and lichen-draped, and in the hedges, the latter also abounding with suitable nooks and crannies for breeding purposes. Perhaps the most familiar is the Blue Titmouse. This tiny species is almost as ubiquitous as the House Sparrow. It is a regular winter guest of ours, and sometimes a pair roost in one of our drain-pipes throughout that season. This special pipe drains a small conservatory; in winter we stop up the end in the building, and then the birds are provided with a cosy nook in which to sleep. It is most amusing to watch them come, towards the close of the short afternoon, and after making a hearty meal from a lump of suet hung up by a string for their special use, fly up into the pipe, the female generally retiring first, followed a few moments after by her mate. We might almost have set our watch by the movements of these Tits, so regularly did they go to roost each evening, not six feet from our kitchen window. For two successive springs they reared their brood in the cap of a ventilating pipe in a building opposite; but now the House Sparrows have turned them out, and obliged them to seek

quarters elsewhere. The Great Titmouse is the next commonest bird. It is a very typical hedgerow species, prominent enough during winter, but more retiring and less noisy in the breeding season. A favourite nesting site is a hole in some stump in the hedges. Then the Coal Titmouse is another familiar bird along the hedge-side, breeding in much the same situations. The Marsh Tit is perhaps the rarest and most local of this engaging quartette, and is frequently seen solitary or attached to a party of the commoner species. The Long-tailed Tit is another common bird of the hedges, and troops of them are familiar objects in these situations, especially in the winter months. Their beautiful nest—one of the handsomest, we always think, in the entire range of bird architecture—is frequently placed amongst brambles and briars, or slung to several twigs of a holly-bush. The white-headed continental race of this Titmouse has never come under our notice in Devonshire, amongst the many hundreds of the typical form we have observed. Thrushes of various species are amongst the most typical of our hedgerow birds. In connection with these species, we may mention that the Blackbird is

by far the commonest in the vicinity of Paignton; and yet in Torquay and its suburbs the Song Thrush is certainly the more abundant of the two. Possibly this may be due to the exceptional abundance of snails—a favourite food of the Song Thrush, but not of the Blackbird—in the latter locality. Here, in the mild climate of South Devon, the Song Thrush is almost as much of a perennial songster as the Robin; but the Blackbird, curiously enough, never regains his matchless flute-like voice after the moult until early in the following spring. In winter we are favoured with the presence of the Redwing and the Fieldfare; but, so far as this immediate neighbourhood is concerned, these birds cannot be classed as very numerous. The Fieldfares draw most of their sustenance from the hedges, levying toll upon the almost inexhaustible supplies of ivy-berries, hips and haws, and holly-berries whenever obtainable. These latter berries are great favourites with the Thrush tribe here, and also with Starlings; so that by Christmas, when these berries are held in high esteem for decorative purposes, most of the trees are stripped. The Redwings are not such berry feeders; they seek their animal food upon

the fields, and rarely go short in a district where long-continued frosts and snowfalls are almost unknown. We are told by some naturalists that the Redwing is one of the first birds to perish from cold, but this is an error. Cold seldom if ever kills so long as food is obtainable, and the frost is the sole secret of the high mortality amongst this species during severe winters. It seals their feeding-grounds and they starve, while the berry-eating Fieldfare suffers little or no inconvenience. It is only as a last resource that the Redwing takes to the harder berries. The Song Thrush feels the pinch of hunger before the Blackbird, because snails during severe weather are often hard to find. Dry weather, if long-continued, also places this bird on short supplies. These snails are exceptionally numerous in wet weather; and then, as we wander along the hedge-side, we may often watch the Song Thrush making a meal from them. His methods are certainly interesting. We have often watched him quite unsuspected at a distance of a few paces. The immortal Mrs. Glasse tells us "first to catch our hare;" the Song Thrush first catches his snail, sometimes by poking about at the bottom of the

hedge. Seizing it in his bill, he flies to the nearest stone or hard ground, and then proceeds to break the shell into pieces by a series of rapid blows, first from one side, then from the other. The taps of the demolishing shell can be heard a hundred yards or more. After each battering process he examines the snail and picks out any morsel that he can detach, frequently rubbing the slimy mass on the ground, to flour it, as it were, and render it more easily separable. The knocking and beating is repeated until every morsel of the striped shell is detached, and, with a final gulp, the remaining portion of the snail is swallowed, and the bird flits off in quest of another victim. We have often been amused to see a Song Thrush pick up his snail when alarmed and fly off with it to a more secluded spot, even the terror of our sudden approach not being sufficient to make the bird forget its prize. Sometimes in autumn we remark a Ring Ouzel or two in the elder-trees near Paignton, but flocks are rarely seen either in spring or autumn round Tor Bay. And this seems all the more remarkable, seeing that the Wheatear, a species that visits Dartmoor to breed, like the Ring Ouzel, passes the district most

regularly at both seasons of migration. Possibly the Ring Ouzels follow the river valleys to the moor.

Another characteristic bird of the hedgerows is the Red-backed Shrike. Here again we have a species set down by some writers to be much rarer than it really is, at least so far as this portion of the South Hams is concerned. It arrives with remarkable punctuality in its old haunts about the first week in May, and from that time onwards until the beginning of September wanders but little from its favourite hedgerow. The wholesale cutting down of tall hedges which has been going on in many parts of our district has disturbed these birds a good deal. They are probably quite as abundant, but more scattered, and many places that formerly contained a pair every summer are now deserted. The Red-backed Shrike is one of the most conspicuous of birds, fond of sitting on the topmost twigs of hedges and isolated bushes, remaining in one spot for hours at a time, and always selecting some post of vantage from which a good look-out for insects and other food can be obtained. They arrive in pairs, live in pairs throughout the summer, and in pairs set off for

their winter quarters in the south. Perhaps this Shrike is most interesting when the young are out of the nest, flitting about the hedges and clamouring for food, which both parents continue to provide long after their offspring are able to fly well. The nest, made in May or early June, is a remarkably pretty one, built in the hedge towards the top, and made of grass stems, stalks of flowers and herbs, and lined plentifully with moss, wool, and hair. The five or six eggs are usually pale green in ground colour, spotted and freckled with olive-brown and grey. The old birds are most assiduous in providing food for their offspring; and we frequently stand and watch them feeding each youngster in turn at intervals of a minute or so. Later on, in August, the young birds themselves may be seen catching their own prey. The favourite food of the Red-backed Shrike, in this part of Devon, is the common grasshopper, an insect specially abundant in the fields and hedgerows. The patient Shrike sits and waits and watches upon some twig, occasionally flitting out to secure an insect flying by, but more often dropping down into the herbage to seize a grasshopper. The bird rarely fails in its attempt,

nimble though these insects be, and the capture is generally eaten upon the ground, but sometimes carried to the hedge. We have seen this Shrike hold a grasshopper in one foot, whilst it picked it to pieces. As most readers may be aware, this Shrike has a curious habit of impaling insects on the thorns in the hedge, spitting them thus for future needs. Mice and small birds are frequently captured and served in the same manner. The way these Shrikes can bolt grasshoppers one after the other is a revelation; we should also state that the indigestible portions of the food—wing cases, wings, feathers, bones, etc., are cast up in the form of pellets.

As might reasonably be expected, these dense tangled hedgerows are specially favoured by the Warblers. It is true some of the species—such as the Lesser Whitethroat—are more abundant in other parts of England, but those we do have make ample amends for this slight deficiency. Commonest of them all is the Whitethroat,—the “White-drot” as the country people call him,—a bird that is to be found in almost every hedge between April and September. He is perhaps the most frequently seen of all, and delights in

perching upon the highest twigs or tossing himself into the air like a shuttlecock to run over his garrulous warble. The Lesser Whitethroat must be classed as rare, although we have seen undoubted specimens of its eggs taken in the South Hams district. Next to the Whitethroat in order of abundance we must place the Blackcap, that sweet-voiced bird whose song resounds from the hedges continuously throughout the spring. He is the earliest of the typical Warblers to arrive; we have a note of his appearance on the 28th of March, but usually the first week in April is the time of his advent. A couple of these birds, fresh and vigorous from the south, singing against each other in happy rivalry, will give you music fit for the gods. We have nowhere remarked this Warbler more plentiful than in the dense thickets round that finest pile of Devonshire ruins, ivy-draped Berry Pomeroy Castle. The Blackcap is an early breeder; we have records of a nest and eggs by the 15th of April, but as a rule these are not found until towards the end of the month. Another common Warbler of the hedgerows is the Chiffchaff. He, too, is an early migrant, and we have repeatedly heard his monotonous song in

March. As proof of the excessive mildness of this highly-favoured county may be mentioned the fact of this species, and the Blackcap too, remaining occasionally over the winter; and the records of these venturesome birds amply show that, in some cases at least, the winter—which can only be described as an almost imperceptible rest or break between autumn and spring—has been successfully passed. We do not believe, however, as we have already pointed out in a previous chapter, that these laggard migrants are indigenous to the county, but are lost and wandering individuals from other localities. The impulse to migrate in autumn is almost as irresistible as the impulse to breed in spring, and we cannot believe that the habit of migration in such birds of regular passage is ever voluntarily allowed to lapse. In less favourable localities these lost migrants would unquestionably have perished for want of food; they owe their preservation entirely to the chance or the fortuitous circumstance that brought them into a region where existence, under specially favourable conditions, was possible. We have already dwelt at some length upon this subject in our works on the Migration of Birds, to which

we would refer the sufficiently interested reader. Let him rest assured that no mild climatic conditions ever tempt the birds indigenous to the county to winter within its limits. The Garden Warbler may also be noticed, if sparingly, in the hedges, especially those bordering gardens and orchards; while the delicate-looking little Willow Wren, common and widely dispersed, must be ranked as one of the heralds of spring to be seen in most hedges in the sheltered districts. So far as our experience goes, the Willow Wren is not so abundant as the Chiffchaff, and shows a special liking for orchards and small plantations where brushwood is plentiful. The Hedge Sparrow is common, and its pretty nest is one of the first prizes of the spring. The glad, if short, carol of the male is one of the most familiar sounds of the hedgerow all the year round, with the exception of the moulting season. The nest of this species is a very favourite one with the Cuckoo in Devonshire, and we have many notes of eggs being taken from it, and of Hedge Sparrows bringing up the young. A few summers ago a young Cuckoo was thus reared in a garden nearly in the centre of Torquay; others similarly almost every season in

a large nursery near Paignton. The Wren, too, is a common hedgerow bird, these places being exceptionally favourable for it, being so full of old stumps, ivy, nooks, and crannies. A favourite nesting place of this bird in Devonshire is in the roof of the "linhays," or roughly made cattle-sheds in the corners of the fields; another, equally preferred, is under some overhanging bank below the hedge. The Wren carols blithely the livelong year, save in the moulting season. In this part of Devonshire it is known almost universally as the "Cutty." Of the Finch tribe, one of the most familiar in the hedges and the fields is the sprightly Chaffinch. Large flocks of this species are common on the fields and adjoining hedgerows during winter, many birds leaving the higher central districts entirely and retiring to the lowlands at this season. Sometimes a few Bramblings may be noticed in their company, but this Finch is by no means a common or a regular visitor to the county—at least this is our experience. In earlier years, during a long residence in Yorkshire, the Brambling was one of the most regular of our winter migrants, and invariably returned to old accustomed haunts season by

season. This is only one of many cases in which we have remarked the comparative scarcity of species that are exceptionally common farther north and east. The great wave of east to west migration sends only its exhausted ripples so far to the south-west. The nest of the Chaffinch is very frequently made in the hedges; but after an examination of many scores of nests, we come to the opinion that they are not so exquisitely made or so lavishly garnished as nests made in the North of England. With the nest of the Long-tailed Tit this, curiously enough, is exactly the reverse, some of the most beautiful we ever saw being made by Devonshire birds. The Greenfinch is also partial to the hedgerows, and is specially fond of nesting in them. We have a record of no less than four nests of this species in one hedge, all within a dozen yards. These birds are very partial to the seeds of the sunflower, and their actions when engaged in obtaining them are very pretty. It is said that flocks of Greenfinches visit the county during winter, but we have not remarked the fact in the extreme south. Another, but a much rarer and more local bird of the hedgerows, is the Bullfinch. Shy and skulking,

like so many birds of showy plumage, this species is often overlooked, and therefore considered to be much rarer than it really is. A few pairs nest every season in the hedgerows round Paignton, and we often come across a pair in the lanes, male and female alternately flitting along in a wavy, dipping manner before us, their white rumps rendering them easy of identification. The clear, rich call-note of this Finch often betrays the bird's presence in dense thickets. In early summer these birds are extremely fond of the seeds of the "star-flower," a bloom which clothes the hedge banks in white masses from March onwards. Although not exactly a typical bird of the hedgerows, the Goldfinch may be mentioned here. A melancholy interest attaches to this gay-plumaged bird. Time was when the Goldfinch lived here as one of the most familiar species in this land of orchards, but nowadays we consider ourselves fortunate if we see half-a-dozen pairs during a year's observation. These we generally meet with on rough uncultivated lands, in old brickfields, and less frequently on the cliffs or beach.

Upon the open fields the lover of birds will find much to amuse and interest him. Some of the

most characteristic species, because they are so readily observed, are the various birds of the Crow tribe. The Rook and the Jackdaw are perhaps too familiar to require more than a passing allusion; the bunches of Starlings that frequent the pastures are equally well known. The Carrion Crow is not so easily identified by the ordinary observer, too closely resembling the Rook; but his green instead of purple glossed coat, and his black face, should not fail to make him known. Then, too, his note is harsher, more closely resembling the croak of the Raven. Magpies, we are glad to say, are still familiar birds upon the fields. We often come across them on the pastures; and only the other day we flushed a party of seven from a meadow on the coombe side not half a mile from Paignton. These birds, especially on the upland fields, often make their nests in low hedges. Jays we sometimes see about the open fields, but they are more given to frequenting orchards, groves, and wooded areas. To suitable fields—fields with trees in or round them—the Tree Pipit is a regular summer visitor, arriving in April and leaving in September. All through the earlier summer days the sweet song of this bird may be heard, and the little musician seen

at intervals as he indulges in one soaring flight after another. We remark the partiality of this Pipit for the higher fields, and in the Paignton lowlands it is not so plentiful as on the hills. The Meadow Pipit visits the turnip and cabbage fields in autumn and winter, sometimes in considerable flocks; and we have remarked similar companies in spring. The great breeding grounds of this Pipit are on the central plateau. Swallows and Martins course about the open pastures, and the former species breeds quite commonly in the many barns and outhouses studded about the fields. Odd birds of both species are occasionally seen well into November. In early autumn parties of Missel Thrushes appear upon the fields, showing preference for pastures and turnip patches; whilst the Sparrow Hawk and the Kestrel, each in their own peculiar way, hunt these places for small birds and mice. At dusk our old friend the Barn Owl comes forth from linhay, barn, and church-steeple, and in noiseless flight quarters the stubbles for mice. South Devon can hardly be described as a game-preserving district, and agricultural conditions are scarcely suited to the undue increase of the Partridge. Nevertheless we have a fair sprinkling of birds

in this immediate neighbourhood, and there are even better localities farther inland. The Quail is a rare and local bird in Devonshire, although one that, like the Waxwing, sometimes visits the county in exceptional numbers. We have never met with the Quail in this district, although local specimens have been obtained, and instances are on record of its having nested in the county. Quails sometimes remain over the winter in Devonshire; but we believe the fact to be in every way analogous with the wintering of such species as Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs.

Gulls of various species are frequent visitors to the lowland fields of Devonshire. In the South Hams one of the most familiar is the Herring Gull. Large flocks of this species assemble at irregular intervals on the pastures pretty well all the year round; whilst in winter the Black-headed Gull is a frequent visitor to those fields especially where tillage operations are in progress. Some of these flocks number several thousands of birds, and when they rise in a fluttering mass, sometimes intermixed with a company of Rooks, the effect is most impressive and beautiful. The smaller Gulls resort to the

fields for worms and grubs, but the larger species almost invariably do so to feed upon some garbage or another. When fields have been manured with fish or other offal the Gulls congregate in force, coming from various parts of the coast, and when disturbed or filled with food it is interesting to remark how the large company will separate into several smaller parties, each betaking itself to the accustomed haunts upon the shore. The Herring Gulls in Tor Bay generally assemble on the fields near a slaughter-house midway between Torquay and Paignton, more especially on "killing days," when an abundance of scraps and offal may be obtained. Sometimes we have seen them soaring at a great height above this gruesome spot as if waiting for the feast, reminding us of the flocks of Vultures we met with years ago in Northern Africa.

Grain fields are by no means plentiful in Devon, especially in the South Hams district, but wherever corn is grown, great numbers of Sparrows and other birds congregate, just as the grain is ripening, to feed upon it. Greenfinches and Sparrows are the greatest depredators, and whether corn, barley, or oats, considerable damage is wrought

by these feathered pilferers. If alarmed, these flocks of birds crowd upon the nearest hedges and trees, to return, however, in scattered order as soon as the danger has passed. The House Sparrow is certainly one of the most thriving species in the county, present everywhere, in attendance on man. It may be found breeding from the ocean cliffs to the highest moorland cottages. In the towns it breeds practically all the year round, if the weather is mild and open. We see this bird repairing its nest in midwinter, and have records of the young at the same date. Brood after brood is reared in rapid succession, and every available spot is utilised for nesting purposes. The Sparrow's increase, however, can be viewed without alarm in such a pastoral county; whilst the undoubted good the bird works is considerable. The horticulturist more especially should welcome the Sparrow. It is one of the deadliest enemies to aphides that exists, and its callow young are to a great extent reared on that special insect food. Many a season we have had to thank the House Sparrow for our crop of roses; had the birds not cleared the trees of these pests, not a bloom, nor scarce a sound leaf, would have opened. We

have repeatedly watched these good offices of the Sparrow, seeing how male and female have explored every bud and twig of the infested trees, until a mouthful of aphides was collected, then each would fly off to the nest. Backwards and forwards the busy searchers would go, through almost every hour of light in the long summer days, until not an insect remained. Sparrows have frequently cleared our chrysanthemum bushes of insect pests in a similar way. It seems incredible that, in the face of this usefulness, such a war of extermination should be waged against the House Sparrow, or that clubs should actually be in existence for the sole purpose of bringing about the extinction of the species. We are no advocates for encouraging the undue increase of this bird, and fully concur in the opinion that its numbers should be kept within reasonable limits, especially in corn-growing areas, but the disease deserves no such drastic remedies as many agriculturists and their equally misguided and ignorant friends suggest.

Incidentally we may here mention that the House Sparrow is subject to more individual variation than is very generally supposed. Much

of this variation is largely due to age, the fully adult characteristics not being all assumed until the bird is several years old. This especially applies to the grey crown and the deep black bill. Individual Sparrows with white feathers in the wings or tail are by no means rare. Several years ago we shot a beautiful variety in our back garden, where it was fraternising with a flock of normally-coloured birds. This example was a nearly uniform rich fawn colour, and is now, or was, in the Torquay Museum. We have also remarked considerable variation in the colour of female birds, some being much darker than others. Sparrows breed long before the fully adult plumage is assumed.

Bird-Life of the Woods and Groves.



GREEN WOODPECKERS.

CHAPTER VI.

BIRD-LIFE OF THE WOODS AND GROVES.

DEVONSHIRE is an exceptionally well-wooded county from the sea-shore inland, over hill and coombe, right up to the great central moorland plateau. Consequently the avifauna affecting such localities is a rich one. Not only are the fields and hedges studded plentifully with trees, but the coombes or valleys are generously timbered, whilst woods and plantations, most of them containing plenty of undergrowth, are scattered in all directions. The lovely area of the South Hams, in which most of our experience of the Devonshire ornithology has been obtained, yields to no other district in the county for the beauty of its woodlands and the abundance of its timber. In many parts of this area the woods stretch right away to the brown and blue waters of the various estuaries,

or to the English Channel itself, sea birds and arboreal species consequently living within a stone's-throw of each other. In the number of woodland species the county can favourably compare with any other district in the British Islands, the Nightingale (which we admit is a loss indeed) and the Siskin being practically the only absentees among the usual bird populations of these particular districts. Some of the species are exceptionally abundant—a fact probably due to the absence of game preserving in many districts, and the consequent immunity from persecution. On the other hand, we are sorry to say there are localities where the gamekeeper has succeeded in well-nigh exterminating not a few of our most interesting birds. To some extent the character of the timber determines the presence of species. Thus the fir and pine woods are specially favoured by the Doves and Owls; the smaller fir plantations and clumps of evergreen oaks are the retreat of Goldcrests; the large oak and beech woods are resorted to by the Wood Wren; in woods where the timber is aged and decayed we find the Woodpeckers most abundant; elm and lime groves are the chosen haunts of Rooks and Herons; whilst

woods with plenty of undergrowth are beloved by the Jay and the Turtle Dove.

As might be expected from the wooded nature of the country, Owls and the commoner species of raptorial birds are still fairly numerous. Of the Owls we have three species breeding within the county, two of them commonly, the other locally, and possibly fast becoming exterminated. This species, we regret to say, is the handsome Long-eared Owl. In a recent work on the ornithology of Devonshire, this Owl is described as a winter visitor, rarely numerous, and very seldom breeding. We fear that the bird's seclusive habits (it is also one of the most nocturnal species) cause it to be overlooked, and have given rise to the statements quoted above. This Owl unquestionably frequents the fir woods at Churston; we have heard its unmistakable cry at various places round Tor Bay, and have little doubt that it frequents and breeds in many spots in that district. A gamekeeper in this neighbourhood assured us several years ago that the "Horned Owl" was only too common on his own particular domain, but that he had after much trouble succeeded in killing most of them.

His description of the bird and its habits was far too accurate to introduce the slightest element of doubt into the matter. Our most familiar wood Owl is of course the well-known and widely distributed Tawny Owl. There are few well-timbered districts throughout the county where this species may not be heard. Like others of its kind, its note is more familiar to most people than its form. This fine Owl is by no means confined to woods; it may be met with near to houses and farm buildings, often taking possession of a solitary tree, and we have notes of nests in lincays in the open fields. This Owl always interests us. We often linger in its haunts at night-time, especially when there is a full moon, to watch its ways and to listen to its hollow-sounding, weird, and even fascinating note. The gloom and the stillness of the surroundings invariably heighten the effect. There is something most impressive about the woods at night. Nothing breaks the stillness, save perhaps the muffled, ceaseless roaring and pulsation of the distant sea, the purr of a Nightjar on the adjoining warren, and the ceaseless warbling and chattering of the Sedge

Birds amongst the iris and osiers. Now and then a weasel or a rabbit scamper across the open glades, or the crow of a startled Pheasant breaks the silence. Suddenly the cry of the Wood Owl sounds faintly from the woods—a deep, full-toned *woo-whoo-hoo*, several times repeated, and then a pause. Once more the startling notes ring out in succession, and then another pause. Perchance next time they break the stillness they are heard just overhead with uncanny and startling suddenness. The soft, almost imperceptible flap of broad brown wings sounds faintly from the sky, and for a fleeting moment the weird hooter is visible in the shimmering, uncertain moonlight, vanishing again in the shadows as ghostlike as he came. Sometimes, while walking along the highway between Torquay and Paignton, on the warm summer nights, we are momentarily startled by this Owl calling overhead, when on his nightly wanderings from the Cockington woods. Another favourite resort of his is in the grounds of Chapel Hill, in Torquay, or the celebrated avenues of lime-trees that once formed a part of the grounds of old Torre Abbey. The Barn Owl, however, is

by far the best known of its tribe in Devonshire, but of course is not strictly confined to the woods; its favourite haunts are, as elsewhere, church-steeple, barns and outhouses, and holes in trees in the vicinity of houses. This Owl is occasionally seen out searching for food just about sunset, whilst in the corn harvest it frequently may be seen by the light of the moon gliding in and out amongst the stooks in quest of mice. A bird-catcher told me that he has caught this Owl in his nets in broad daylight. It had come after the mice which had been attracted by the seed scattered as a lure.

Our woodland birds of prey, alas, are few nowadays. The Kite is gone, and must have disappeared many years ago, for Montagu knew it not as a breeding species in his time. There can be little doubt, however, that this fine bird was formerly indigenous to the county. But one example has come within our knowledge during the past eight years, and that was trapped somewhere in this immediate neighbourhood in April 1891. The Common Buzzard still breeds in some of the Devonshire woodlands, but its great strongholds in the county now are on the marine

cliffs and some of the least frequented parts of the moors. Occasionally we see this species on the lowlands near the coast, soaring in its very characteristic way. The Sparrowhawk and the Kestrel are the two commonest raptorial birds of the woods and groves, the former perhaps being the most abundant in many districts. In our own immediate neighbourhood, however, we should class the Kestrel as the commonest, and in addition to the woods it breeds in great numbers on the cliffs along the coast. But more of that anon. Although this bold Hawk is particularly partial to fir woods—using them as a roosting place and a breeding station—it is by no means unfrequently seen amongst deciduous trees, especially in localities where hedgerows and underwood afford shelter for plenty of small birds. The comparative abundance of the Sparrowhawk in the county, we are convinced, is due to the lax methods of game preserving; once let these conditions change, and the keeper would soon lessen its numbers to the vanishing point, as he has already done in so many other counties sacred to the game fetish. The graceful Kestrel is comparatively harmless, yet we fear

he would share in the general massacre. The woods have few more charming avine ornaments than he, as he hangs poised high up in the blue sky above them. There appears to be considerable diversity of opinion concerning the nesting habits of this little Falcon. Some observers maintain that the bird builds a nest for itself, like the Sparrowhawk; others as confidently assert that in woods it selects the old home of a Crow, a Magpie, or some other species, in which to rear its young. We expressed the latter opinion nearly twenty years ago (*Rural Bird-Life*); and from a long experience of the Kestrel, extending over a quarter of a century, are still more convinced that this bird does not build a nest of its own in trees. When breeding on cliffs or amongst masonry, the nest is a mere hollow, occasionally lined with food refuse, pellets, and so forth. Another Falcon with very similar domestic arrangements is the Hobby. This bird, we are glad to record, still breeds in some of the higher woodlands; we were assured that it did so in some large woods almost under the shadow of Hay Tor, on the margin of the moors. There are many other localities in the

county admirably suited to the requirements of this Falcon, and there can be little doubt that it is considerably overlooked, especially in the woodlands lying between the South Hams and the central plateau.

Our woods and groves are well stocked with birds of the Pigeon tribe, but by far the most abundant and widely distributed species is the Ring Dove. This bird seems everywhere to be on the increase, and the damage it works upon the crops is somewhat serious. In such a thoroughly pastoral county we do not think that this increase need be viewed with any great alarm by the farmer. The bird, on the other hand, does much good in consuming the seeds and leaves of many troublesome weeds, whilst its flesh is an esteemed delicacy. In all parts of the county this Dove shows a decided preference for fir and pine woods, or for woods in which those trees occur. We often pause at dusk to watch the Ring Doves come home to roost from the surrounding fields. Singly and in pairs and companies they arrive, generally flying high, and dropping with great speed and noisy clatter of wings into the roost trees. Belated birds con-

tinue to come in until their forms can scarcely be distinguished against the sky. They are wary and watchful in the extreme, and have astonishing command over themselves during rapid flight, swerving with great adroitness, should they catch a glimpse of us in our ambush beneath the trees. This Dove is most prolific, beginning to breed in March and continuing to do so until the following September. In some parts of the South Hams district of Devonshire annual shoots or battues of this Pigeon are held. The guns in some cases are stationed over an area of six or eight miles of country, and the birds are thus practically kept on the move all day. Upon the approach of dusk great slaughter takes place as the Pigeons seek their accustomed roosts. In this way the numbers of Ring Doves are kept within reasonable limits. Many Ring Doves breed within a stone's-throw of the sea, sometimes in stunted bushes and dense scrub at the summit of the cliffs, but the latter are the favourite resorts of the Stock Dove, of which we shall have more to say in a later chapter. We may however remark, in passing, that this Dove is not found in woods in this part of the country to anything like the extent that

it is in the north of England, notably in the "Dukeries." Here it is a sea-coast bird principally, and practically takes the place of the Rock Dove on our maritime cliffs. Lastly, we may allude to the Turtle Dove. This is decidedly the rarest and most local of the three woodland Pigeons, and is known to breed in but few places only. It is a summer migrant, arriving in Devonshire at the end of April or the beginning of May, and leaving us again in September. One or two pairs breed regularly in our immediate neighbourhood; whilst during the migration period we occasionally see or hear others that are merely passing over the district. Its well-known and easily recognised call-note may be most frequently heard from well-timbered pleasure-grounds and woods in which there is a dense undergrowth. It may be of interest to remark that we caught an example of the Collared Turtle Dove (*Turtur risorius*) last spring (1898). We kept it for a month, until it had nearly completed its moult, and then it managed to escape. Whether this individual was an escaped bird, or one that had possibly been bred in some of the woods near Plymouth (*vide Zoologist*, 1877, p. 493), we are unable to say.

Other woodland birds that interest us considerably are the Woodpeckers. All the indigenous British species are resident in the county, but the Black and White Woodpeckers are much rarer and more local than the Green Woodpecker. The Great Spotted Woodpecker is unquestionably the rarest of the three, but taking into consideration the retiring habits of the species, we should not describe it as uncommon. We have either seen or heard of it in all wooded parts of the county that we have visited. We know that it breeds near Newton Abbot, near Exeter, and in the woods around Ashburton, in the Dart Valley, and near Slapton. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is certainly more numerous, but from its small size still more likely to be overlooked. This tiny Woodpecker is by no means confined to woods; we have often seen it in pleasure-grounds, and even in isolated trees on lawns and near to houses. It is also a by no means unfrequent visitor to old orchards. Possibly some of the Great Spotted Woodpeckers that visit our eastern coast districts in autumn wander as far to the south-west as Devonshire, but the frequency with which the bird is seen during autumn, winter, and spring, comparatively with

summer, must not be taken to indicate a migratory influx, being due to the fact that the bird is far more readily observed amongst the leafless trees at those seasons. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker might be thought to be more abundant in winter than in summer, but so far as is known this bird is not migratory, and the apparent increase in its numbers is due entirely to the better facilities for observation. Brightly coloured as these birds are, they are most difficult to see when clinging to the many coloured limbs and trunks of trees; not only so, but they have the habit of always trying to get the trunk or branch between the observer and themselves. We frequently see or hear the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in this neighbourhood, and we know that it breeds in many of the surrounding woods. The commonest of the three species, however, is the Green Woodpecker. In this neighbourhood—in fact, in all the country surrounding Tor Bay, it is decidedly a common bird, as Woodpeckers go. Neither is it by any means confined to the woods or even to the timber; it is a common bird amongst the cliffs, and we have several interesting notes concerning its habits in

such localities, when we come to deal with the bird-life frequenting them. We have had many exceptionally good opportunities of studying the actions of this charming bird. It not only frequents the large massive timber, showing, by the way, an especial preference for elms, but may frequently be seen in small trees. It alights in the slender topmost branches with as much agility as it clings to the bark of limbs and trunk. When so perched we have seen it hopping about from twig to twig, sometimes taking a hop of a yard or more, the slender branches bending beneath its weight. On one occasion we watched a Green Woodpecker for some ten minutes perched in the top of a small elm below which we were standing. It never stirred from its perch, but every few moments turned its head from side to side as if on the look-out for any approaching danger; and, finally, when it uttered its clear-sounding *hi-hi-hi*, we were absolutely startled by the loudness of its tone. Then we have repeatedly watched it fly up to the foot of some tree—there is one special tree, dead from root to summit, where we have seen the same thing several times—and commence its search for insects, first on one side, then on the

other, now running out on to a horizontal branch, then back to the trunk, occasionally pausing to give a few hearty taps with its chisel-like bill at some loose bit of bark under which insects of some kind were doubtless lurking. The merry note of this Woodpecker may be heard in all directions, especially in spring, and from time to time the bird may be seen crossing from one tree to another in the up and down flight so peculiar to birds of this family. He is a very conspicuous bird in the open, especially when flying before the observer, when his brilliant yellow back forms the greatest attraction to the eye. We have often remarked the curious way in which a Woodpecker alights upon a tree, giving one the impression of a dart, hurled by some invisible means, sticking to the branch or trunk. It is a somewhat early breeder. We have known its eggs laid early in April, and preparations being made for the nest early in March. In this locality elm-trees seem the favourite sites. We know one lofty elm that has had a nest of this species in its trunk for five years in succession. The nest-hole is excavated by the old birds, and in many cases we have discovered the whereabouts of the nest by the heap of chips

at the foot of the trunk. Some of these holes are so beautifully and perfectly formed that it is hard to believe that they have not been made by tools in human hands. It has been said that an immigration of this species takes place in autumn, but we have not remarked anything of the kind in this particular locality of the South Hams. The Green Woodpecker is perhaps more frequently seen during winter and heard during summer—a fact entirely due to the absence or presence of foliage. As previously remarked, this Woodpecker is a visitor to the gardens of Torquay, and we have seen it in the beautiful cemetery just outside the town.

Several birds of the Crow tribe must be regarded as special features of our Devonshire woods and groves. The Rook, of course, is a common and widely distributed species, requiring no further notice here. We may, however, in passing just call attention to the very regular manner in which these birds return to their roosting places, especially in winter-time. There is a large fir plantation here to which the birds may be seen wending their way at the close of the short afternoons, flying in a long straggling flock to the dark

trees that often stand out black against the blood-red or fiery-yellow sunset sky. We can scarcely include the Raven as a woodland species in Devonshire now, for here, as in most other places, this species has been exterminated from most wooded districts, and is now best known as a dweller on inland tors and on maritime cliffs. It is said, however, that a few Ravens still haunt some of the woods in the northern parts of the county. A very good substitute for the Raven, however, is to be found in the Carrion Crow. This bold and cunning bird is commonly distributed over the well-timbered areas, and seems specially fond of making its headquarters in some small plantation. We have a nest of this bird in a tall elm—one of a group—in an orchard close to Paignton; it has been tenanted regularly for the past seven years to our knowledge. It always seems a mystery to me that the farmer residing not a hundred yards from the tree tolerates such company in the neighbourhood of his poultry-yard; but possibly the sable thieves respect the property of their host. The appearance of the birds at this nest, and their persistent hoarse croaking cries, is always one of the first signs of spring to us. This nest has been

blown out several times, but is always rebuilt in much the same spot. Carrion Crows may be seen almost everywhere along the country-side; they are great wanderers, but appear to be attached to certain roosting places in the woods. Want of systematic game preserving in the county is probably the secret of this bird's abundance. Few people molest him, and the little that is done to work his destruction has no very perceptible result in thinning his numbers. With all his misdeeds, long may those numbers be maintained. There are few English shires left where he can enjoy such immunity as in Devonshire. The Magpie and the Jay, round about this portion of the county at all events, enjoy a similar immunity, and are consequently fairly abundant. We cannot wander far in this locality without hearing the welcome *rark rark* of the Jay, or seeing the handsome fellows trooping along the wooded bottoms, or flitting off across the fields to the shelter of the woods and plantations. Half-a-dozen or more may frequently be seen together, especially in autumn, attracted perhaps to one particular oak-tree that may chance to bear exceptionally fine acorns. We have seen Jays flutter at the end of a

branch and break off an acorn, then fly away with the prize to some quiet nook, possibly to conceal it. Jays hereabouts not only nest in the woods, but in the tall hedges, a favourite site being some lofty holly or ivy-clad whitethorn. The broods may be seen in company with their parents, trooping from tree to tree, and every now and then breaking out into a deafening chorus of harsh cries; they become particularly vociferous towards night, and are specially fond of roosting amongst evergreens. One spot we know of, not a mile from our residence, where as many as twenty Jays have come to roost in the firs and larches in a single evening. Then, too, the Magpie is a common bird, because it lives comparatively free from persecution. This species is perhaps more confined to the woodlands than the Jay. We often meet with it in pairs or family parties upon the pastures, and its chattering cry from the trees, especially towards dusk, is a familiar sound indeed to us. The same superstition clings to the Magpie in Devonshire as it does elsewhere. We know people who would not have a stuffed Magpie in their house on any account, assuring us that bad fortune would be sure to follow. Our country-side

contains no brighter avine ornament than the Magpie, and there are few prettier sights than a bird of this species flitting along in straight unwavering course across the fields or above the dense woodlands, flashing black and white in the bright sunshine, or standing with long tail erect upon the green pastures, in a crouching half-startled sort of way, ready for instant flight if need be. In some woods many Magpies' nests may be found within a comparatively small area, and at all times the birds evince a certain amount of sociability or even gregariousness.

The Heron, of course, demands passing mention in a chapter on the woodland bird-life of Devonshire. In the South Hams district this bird is widely known as a "Crane." Odd pairs nest in some of the woods in the higher valleys of the Dart; then there is the famous heronry at Sharp-ham, lower down the river. So far as we know, there are no heronries established on cliffs in the county; all are in trees, and many of them in woods. Of the Game Birds dwelling in the woodlands the Pheasant is the sole representative. Nowhere in Devonshire does Pheasant preserving approach in importance that prevailing in so many

other parts of the country, especially in some of the eastern counties. In many localities the birds are left much to themselves; there is little or no artificial breeding, no big shoots, and, fortunately, few game-keepers animated with a spirit of destructiveness bent on exterminating every winged thing on their domain. Curiously enough, the localities where Pheasants are most numerous in this immediate neighbourhood are those where Jays and Magpies and Kestrels are commonest! Only the other day we flushed a brace of splendid cock Pheasants from the corner of a field where, a little farther on, half-a-dozen Magpies rose up together, and Jays in plenty were calling not a quarter of a mile away below them in the orchards in the valley. Surely these things speak for themselves and cast a strong light upon the crass ignorance that has inspired the extermination of so many of our interesting and most useful birds. Too often, as we know by experience, have harmless "vermin" been held responsible for a short supply of game, whereas in reality dishonest keepers and dealers are alone the cause. It may be worthy of remark that many of the Pheasants seen here want the white ring, and may possibly be pure-bred *colchicus*.

Another interesting bird that breeds sparingly in the Devonshire woods is the Woodcock. From lack of absolute information it is almost impossible to outline even the approximate distribution of this species in the county during the breeding season. There can be no doubt that many pairs nest within our limits, but the fact is never even suspected. Keepers in various parts of the South Hams have assured us repeatedly that the Woodcock bred in their covers; but down to the present time we have never had the good fortune to examine a Devonshire nest. As a rule, the haunts of the Woodcock are difficult of access during the breeding season. Keepers are naturally loth to disturb the covers at such a time, and to search indiscriminately for nests without the guidance of local knowledge is very much like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Perhaps some other ornithologist more fortunate than us has succeeded in finding the prize; if so, we should like to be made acquainted with the fact.

Coming now to the smaller birds, we may say that woods are by no means favourite haunts of the Passeres. These birds prefer cover in more open country—gardens, thickets, fields, hedgerows,

orchards, and the like; woods are too close and confined for them. The Wood Wren, however, is a dweller amongst the trees of some of our Devonian woods; local in distribution certainly, but fairly numerous in the few favoured spots it selects for its summer quarters. We have met with this pretty Warbler about Newton Abbot, Ipplepen, and in the vicinity of Berry Pomeroy. We have heard its unmistakable note below Marldon, in a wooded coombe that runs almost to the highway between Paignton and Torquay. As most readers may be aware, this species lives amongst the branches of tall trees, and does not frequent the bushes and thickets. The song of this bird is a most characteristic one, a sibilant trill uttered time after time in monotonous succession as the tiny minstrel sits in the tree-tops quivering and vibrating its wings and tail. The call-note—a double one, which may be expressed as *dee-ur dee-ur*, oft repeated—very closely resembles certain cries of the Great Titmouse. The Chiffchaff and the Willow Wren are also tenants of the woods and plantations, the former especially; and shortly after its arrival in spring the trees echo and re-echo with its monotonous double cry all day long.

This little Warbler is especially numerous in all the woods round Berry Pomeroy Castle. Another little bird, perhaps not very distantly related to the Willow Wrens, that frequents many of our fir and larch plantations is the Goldcrest, the tiniest member of Britain's avifauna. The Goldcrest breeds commonly in Devonshire, and there is apparently a large increase in their number in the autumn, when the migratory flights from the Continent reach this country. During the non-breeding season the Goldcrest may be met with in almost any hedge, orchard, or garden, but it chiefly retires to shrubberies and fir and larch plantations to nest. There is a small group of fir-trees just outside Churston Station, extending for some distance along the sides of the highway to Brixham, in which a few pairs of Goldcrests have bred for years to our certain knowledge. Two specimens of that rare visitor to our islands, the Firecrest, are said to have been obtained at Torquay. We may remark, however, that the Goldcrest is never seen in such enormous numbers as is frequently the case farther north and east, especially along our eastern seaboard. The Creeper is another small woodland

bird which we often notice amongst the trees; it is, however, by no means confined to woods, but is distributed over most districts that are well timbered. Both the Robin and the Wren may be met with in the woods, the latter bird especially; while the Cuckoo makes them ring again with its cheery song from April onwards to June. We have repeatedly remarked that the number of these birds varies considerably from year to year. The present season, in this part of Devonshire, has been somewhat remarkable for the scarcity of the Cuckoo, and its notes have not been heard to anything like the extent that they were the previous summer. Last year a young Cuckoo made his appearance on a lawn here, and was fed most industriously day after day by a pair of Wagtails. Odd examples of this species are sometimes observed in Devonshire very late in the autumn, even up to the middle of October. The Goatsucker is another dweller in the wooded districts, arriving towards the end of April or early in May. This bird, however, is more partial to the outskirts of the woods than to their remoter portions, fond of the open bracken and bush-covered ground by their borders,

yet frequently passing the day on some flat branch within the shade of the trees. This species retires south again in September, but examples have been observed in the county at much later dates. The Wryneck, we should remark, is a rare bird in the county, but one that is overlooked. We have repeatedly observed it and listened to its very peculiar call in the immediate vicinity of Paignton. Titmice of various species, especially the Great Titmouse, may be frequently met with in the woods; while occasionally a wandering party of Crossbills make their appearance amongst the fir plantations. There are examples of the Common Crossbill in the Torquay Museum which were obtained in the wooded grounds of Chapel Hill, just above Torre railway station. Such is a brief *resumé* of the birds that may be met with in our grand Devonshire woodlands and groves—places that, apart from their avine inhabitants, are full of charm, not only from a purely picturesque but from a botanical point of view as well.

Bird-Life along the Shore.



RINGED PLOVERS. — PAIGNTON SANDS.

CHAPTER VII.

BIRD-LIFE ALONG THE SHORE.

BIRD-LIFE along the shore, in a county like Devonshire, must be taken as a very comprehensive phrase. Next to Cornwall, this is our most sea-encircled English county, and its extensive coasts, washed by both Bristol and English Channels, present great diversity of physical aspect, and a corresponding variety in the bird-life upon them. Few other reaches of the English coast-line present us with such complete and sudden changes in their general aspect. Noble ranges of sea-washed cliffs give place to broad flat estuaries and muds; stretches of sand and shingle are separated by extensive marshlands and bold, billowy, rocky downs; fiords and smaller indentations are succeeded by level sandy reaches; bold headlands, wide sweeping bays, and labyrinths of tidal channels following one after the other as

the glorious panorama of the coast sweeps past the eye in imagination, or more slowly reveals itself to the passenger aboard the coasting vessel. No other part of the British coast-line is more suited to the needs of a varied bird population; and yet the bird-life upon it does not quite come up to our expectations. This is chiefly due to the fact that the county is situated too far to the south-west to be in the direct path of many migratory birds, and too far south for various sedentary species. Attractive as it may be, the coast of Devon can never hope to rival or even approach in interest such shores as those of many of our eastern counties. We record this as our opinion, formed after a long residence upon one, and a rich and varied life's experience of the other. Apart from this, there is indeed much to interest the ornithologist upon the coasts of Devon, as we hope the following brief sketches of their avine aspects will show.

We propose chiefly to devote the present chapter to a brief outline of the bird-life that resorts to the mudflats and low sandy reaches, more especially to those between Exmouth and Plymouth, where personal experience may best apply. A much

better haunt for wading birds than many of these tidal muds could not be conceived ; but local changes have effaced much of their old-time ornithological features. Probably the most important has been the invasion of these localities by railways. Most shore birds of all things prefer perfect quiet and seclusion, and these two conditions have vanished for ever with the advent of the locomotive. Resident birds, even some of the shyest, will in time become more or less reconciled to the roar of the passing train, but visitors do not so readily overcome their fears. Both sides of the estuary of the Exe, and the most marshy and muddy side of that of the Teign, have been invaded by railways, and the vast numbers of shore birds that formerly visited these districts now do so no more. But the traveller by the Great Western Railway between Exeter and Newton Abbot may repeatedly satisfy himself that, although the migrant hosts have sought quieter haunts elsewhere, the resident species have accustomed themselves to the change. In places the flying express thunders by the mudflats and saltings with only a low wall between it and them. More especially is this the case between Exminster

and Dawlish, and again between Teignmouth and Newton Abbot. If the tide be out, and the muds consequently exposed, more likely than not he will remark here and there the grey figures of Herons standing in the shallows or on the shore, intent upon fishing, and taking but little notice of the passing train. The Heron is one of our wariest and shyest birds, and yet custom has so reconciled it to the locomotive that it is allowed to pass with indifference. The Gulls are much the same, and the train will be allowed to pass them within gunshot, whilst an approaching man would invariably be kept at a safe distance. We have seen Shags fishing in these estuaries at high water almost under the carriage windows. It is the same elsewhere; and most railway travellers of an observant turn of mind must have repeatedly remarked such shy birds as Coots and Grebes, Pheasants and Partridges, watch a passing train without the slightest symptom of alarm. Then we have the case of the Rook, of which there are countless instances of its remaining in occupation of certain trees whilst busy towns have grown around them, or railways have pierced their old-time resorts. There can be little doubt that railways would

never have exterminated the Great Bustard from the open wolds and plains, and its absence must be ascribed to far more direct causes. In some parts of continental Europe these birds view a passing train with as much indifference as a Pheasant does in England.

All changes notwithstanding, these shores in Devonshire, especially the more secluded parts of the coast, are still the resort of many interesting species. Each recurring autumn brings them; not perhaps in the quantities we may notice in more favoured districts, yet in numbers that are sufficient to make them prominent features of the shore. Let us deal with the one or possibly two resident species first. It is a somewhat remarkable fact that along the entire mainland coast-line of Devon there is not a single wading shore-bird that breeds, with the sole exception of the Ringed Plover and possibly the Oystercatcher. The Ringed Plover breeds here and there along the coast, especially about the mouth of the Exe, and on the remarkably fine stretch of sands at Slapton; but there are many localities, apparently suited to the breeding requirements of this species, in which it never

seems to nest. The Oystercatcher is much rarer still as a breeding bird, notwithstanding the many likely spots, and we have never met with the bird under circumstances that suggested a nest. It is said formerly to have bred upon the wild rocky shore near the Start, but we doubt if there is a single point on the mainland where it nests to-day. Neither the Common Tern nor the Lesser Tern has a single breeding station in the county, although both nest in the neighbouring county of Dorset, on the spit of sands that terminates in Portland Bill. In August, however, a very different state of things begins to prevail. Perhaps the first bird to mark the coming change is the Common Sandpiper. It commences to retire from the inland plateau to the coast in July, and as the autumn advances its numbers increase. This engaging little bird not only frequents the mudflats, but is also very partial to the rocky beaches. It is a fairly common bird all round Tor Bay, and we have shot examples so late on in the year as to suggest that odd individuals may pass the winter with us. They may be seen in small parties, usually made up of the brood and their parents, but sometimes several broods join

into a flock. These flocks frequent the coast until the end of September, after which date odd birds alone are met with. Now and then a Green Sandpiper may be met with about the marshes of the Teign and Exe all the winter through, and there is some evidence to suggest that the species breeds within the county. In passing, it may be of interest to remark that the Wood Sandpiper was first made known to be a British bird by Montagu, who records an example shot on the south coast of Devon. We have also shot on the rocky beaches of Tor Bay a bird which we believe to be an example of the American Spotted Sandpiper in winter plumage. This specimen is now in the museum of the Torquay Natural History Society. Almost simultaneously with the appearance of the Common Sandpiper the Dunlin returns to the mudflats and salt marshes. At first single birds, odd pairs, and little parties are seen, but as the autumn advances these seem to form up into larger companies, perhaps to migrate in flocks. Fair-sized flocks of these birds are occasionally seen, but, so far as our experience goes, the vast flights of more northern and eastern districts are quite unknown. The graceful evolu-

tions of these little Sandpipers are often most interesting as the birds rise in compact bunches and, with a chorus of low cries, turn and twist, spread out and close up again, ever seeming on the point of alighting, but without doing so, now looking black against the muds, then suddenly disappearing or glinting like animated silver as they simultaneously turn the white underparts to the sun. There can be no doubt that both the large and the small race of Dunlins frequent the Devonshire coasts. The first to arrive in autumn are the small birds, doubtless the ones that breed in our islands and their immediate vicinity; these appear to migrate farther south before winter, and their places are then said to be taken by the large ones. We have not sufficient material at our command to express a very definite opinion upon the matter, but our own observations certainly tend to confirm this. Between the tides, Dunlins often betake themselves to the shingly beaches above high-water mark, there to wait until the mud is again exposed.

Towards the end of August Ringed Plovers arrive in moderate-sized flocks. These are composed of young birds and their parents. Their

tameness is often remarkable until harassed by the shore shooter. We often succeed in quietly walking up to within a few yards of these engaging little birds as they sit almost invisible upon the higher banks of shingle, or run by the margin of the waves breaking upon the shore. They are constantly in motion while feeding, tripping here and there about the sands, and if alarmed rising in a scattered manner but drawing into a compact bunch at once, flying out to sea for a little way, then returning to some quieter spot farther along the shore. As soon as they alight they scatter in quest of food, and may be flushed time after time from one reach of sand without showing any inclination to desert it. We have noticed that these flocks of Ringed Plovers are very regular in returning to certain sands, and the date of their arrival scarcely varies from year to year. While speaking of Ringed Plovers we may mention that during the past autumn (7th of September 1898) we flushed an example of the Killdeer Plover (*Oxyechus vociferus*) from Paignton sands. There could be no possible doubt about the species, for it rose in a very leisurely way from our very feet, the chestnut-buff of the rump and

tail coverts catching the eye at once. We remember the "Old Bushman's" saying, "What is hit is history, but what is missed is mystery," and we have no wish to see this occurrence reckoned among the instances upon which the Killdeer Plover's claim to be regarded as a British bird may rest. We cannot produce our bird, but we record the circumstance as an interesting fact. We may mention that this species has been obtained on the Scilly Islands; and also the fact that more than one rare bird has been obtained upon these sands. Immediate pursuit of our bird was impossible, because the tide prevented us from following it down the coast towards Torquay, and subsequent search ended in failure.

Almost invariably a few Sanderlings are attached to these flocks of Ringed Plovers and remain in their company throughout the winter. We have killed Sanderlings and Plovers at the same discharge of the gun. The bird cannot be regarded as abundant in any part of this district, but larger flocks are sometimes remarked about the estuary of the Exe. This species is one that does not occur in such numbers now as it did

formerly. A little later in the year small flocks of Purple Sandpipers visit the rocky shores of Tor Bay. We generally find them on the coast between Paignton and Churston (Broad Sands and Goodrington), where the beach is rocky. A favourite spot for this Sandpiper, and where we have repeatedly shot it, is where a small stream flows over a pebbly bit of beach into the sea at Broad Sands. Some seasons the birds are only seen in pairs, and we take this as an indication that the broods have been destroyed or that the nests were unfortunate. The Purple Sandpiper seeks most of its food amongst the weed-draped rocks and stones; it is perhaps the most marine and aquatic of its family, not only swimming freely, but alighting on the sea when flushed. It is not by any means a shy bird while with us, and we usually flush it almost from our feet before being aware of its presence. The dark plumage and white patches in the wings render this species easy of identification as it rises from the rocks. Another frequenter of the rocky beaches during autumn is the Turnstone. We had an example of this bird shot near Hope's Nose in Tor Bay in autumn which still retained its full breeding plumage. We most

frequently meet with this species in odd pairs or alone, but sometimes a party of half-a-dozen—the brood and their parents presumably—are seen. Turnstones are sometimes met with on the rocky islands in Tor Bay. They are always somewhat wild and difficult to approach. It may be seen here from the end of August onwards, but we do not think that it remains with us during the winter, except in very occasional instances. Another bird almost as rare in the vicinity of Tor Bay is the Oystercatcher. This seems all the more remarkable seeing that the coast hereabouts is eminently suited to its requirements. We do not think we have seen it in this Bay more than half-a-dozen times during a residence of eight years in the locality, save during the winter of 1898-99, when the species was exceptionally abundant. Curiously enough, we have seen it most frequently in precisely the same spots as those frequented by the Turnstone.

Late in autumn two species of Plover appear in some numbers upon many parts of the low-lying coasts of Devonshire. The most familiar, as it certainly is the most abundant, is the well-known Lapwing. Some of the flocks of this bird that

haunt the muds and saltings during winter especially are of enormous size. There can be no doubt that many of these birds are migrants; the county could never supply them all. Tens of thousands of Lapwings occasionally invade us from the north and east, particularly during hard winters. They do not often appear in the Tor Bay district in such large flocks, but a little higher up the coast, in the Teignmouth and Exmouth areas, their numbers are often impressive. Continued frosts also bring the Golden Plovers down to the salt marshes and mudflats, where they assemble in flocks. They are remarkably wary and difficult of approach, but we have known numbers to be obtained by lying in wait for them concealed on the muds and flats. In autumn the Grey Plover is also sometimes met with in the Teignmouth district, but the bird is decidedly rare.

Various Sandpipers, in addition to those already mentioned, visit our coasts especially during the two seasons of passage. One of the most interesting of these is the Knot. Small flocks of this interesting polar species may be observed on the Devonshire mudflats about the third week

in August, and for about a month or six weeks continue to frequent them. The bird cannot be regarded as at all common in the Tor Bay district—there is no ground suitable for them. Neither have we ever remarked them in any great numbers about Teignmouth or Exmouth, although occurring there every season. We are informed that the bird is much more numerous lower down the coast about Kingsbridge and Plymouth; and this seems to suggest that the birds reach these places by an overland route direct from the northern coasts of the county, and not by following the shore from the east. That the Knot does so migrate across country is proved by the late Henry Swaysland, who assured us years ago that he once caught six of them in his net whilst bird-catching at the Devil's Dyke, some distance inland from Brighton. All these migratory Knots do not appear to leave the country during winter, and many instances of its occurrence at that season are on record. Then that equally interesting polar bird, the Curlew Sandpiper, passes our coasts on its spring and autumn migrations, although in no great numbers, and frequently mixed with bunches of Dunlins. It is also some-

what erratic in its movements, and a year in which it may be numerous is often followed by seasons when the reverse is the case. The coasts of Tor Bay are not suited to such a species, but it is not unfrequent about the estuaries both to the east and west of us. The Redshank is a somewhat scarce and very local winter visitor to the south coast of Devon. We have here another species that has become comparatively rare of late years. Formerly this bird was common about the estuaries of the Exe and the Teign—country admirably suited to it, and very similar to the Wash district, but on a smaller scale. We sometimes see a few of these birds in spring and autumn, and more frequently hear their characteristic whistle at night when passing over the Tor Bay area. The Greenshank is much rarer still, although we believe it passes along the coasts every autumn and spring. As might be expected, the Bar-tailed Godwit passes the coasts of Devon on its annual migrations to and from the north; while a few individuals winter occasionally in the estuaries of the southern parts of the county. In the Tor Bay district these birds are far more often heard than seen, passing over us on migration at night. Odd pairs, however,

sometimes alight upon the coast, especially in the Torquay portion of the bay, where the shore is somewhat muddy. Such a pair visited us in the autumn of 1897, and so tame were they that one of them was caught. The birds are more numerous in the muddy areas of the Exe and Teign. The first week in May invariably brings us the Whimbrel. Great numbers of these birds pass over the Tor Bay district by night, as may be proved by their well-known cries uttered whilst on passage. On the still May nights we often stand and listen to the passing flocks, sometimes flying just overhead, at others at heights so remote that their cries can scarcely be heard. They fly low on overcast, misty nights; high when the moon and stars are shining brightly. The flocks succeed each other at intervals of a few minutes, but sometimes much longer periods divide them. First the well-known notes may be heard sounding faintly from afar, louder and louder becomes the rapid chorus of tittering cries, until the birds are directly overhead, then they grow fainter and fainter as the flock pursues its way almost directly north. The birds do not return so regularly in autumn, but the flocks may be heard crossing the night sky in

the same noisy way. We hear most of them in September. Occasionally a few birds are tempted to alight upon the Paignton sands, but they rarely stay for many hours, and are wild and unapproachable. Two springs ago we got within a hundred yards of a pair of Whimbrels on these sands, when they rose with much clamour and flew round and round in circles for a long time, until they finally went off in a northerly direction at a great height in the air. Small parties of these birds are seen pretty regularly about the estuaries, and a few occasionally remain on them all the winter. This bird unquestionably migrates across country, and is by no means confined to the coasts. We know of few more impressive migrations than that of this species. From early autumn until the following spring the Curlew is one of the most familiar of the larger birds upon the shore. Familiar at a distance only, for there is not a warier bird upon the coast, or one more ready to take alarm and disturb all other fowl in the vicinity as it dashes impetuously away. The Curlew used to be by no means uncommon amongst the rocks at low water in Tor Bay, but its numbers have decidedly decreased the last few years. Probably this is

due to the rapid growth of population in the immediate neighbourhood. We have seen Curlews on the coast here at all times of the year. The bird breeds on Dartmoor, and can pay fleeting visits to the coast at any time with no great exertion. We rarely see a flock of Curlew on the shore in this district, but farther along the coast, where marsh-land and mudflats are frequent, such a sight is by no means uncommon. The Curlews that breed in Devon retire to the coasts as soon as their young can fly, which is in July or August, and from that time onwards the numbers gradually increase as migratory individuals continue to arrive. There are few more pleasing sounds to be heard along the flat shore than the shrill piping *curlee-curlee* of this fine bird. Curlews time the tides to a nicety. At high water they usually retire inland, but shortly after the first rocks appear above the ebbing tide back they come again to feed, following the receding sea and retiring before it as it flows again landwards.

Of all the birds observed upon the shore the Gulls are the most prominent, the most readily remarked. They are always with us too; when-

ever and wherever we may wander along the coast Gulls of some species or other are sure to be met with sooner or later. Of these by far the most numerous and widely dispersed is the Herring Gull. From one end of the southern coast-line to the other this Gull is the most familiar species, and we should also feel inclined to assert that it is the only member of the family that breeds upon it. In this part of the county Gulls are most numerous after the breeding season is over. Then the Herring Gulls are reinforced by large arrivals of Kittiwakes, Common Gulls, Black-headed Gulls, and in smaller numbers the two species of Black-backed Gulls. These latter birds are by far the least numerous, the larger species, *Larus marinus*, occasionally appearing in the Tor Bay district in pairs or solitarily. We have a record, however, of a large flock of these birds on the beach at Livermead after a spell of very rough weather. The Devonshire breeding place of this handsome Gull is on Lundy Island. The smaller species of Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*, also has no nesting place on the southern coast-line, although it has been recorded from the vicinity of Bolt Head

during summer. Its only breeding stations are on Lundy Island and in isolated spots along the northern coasts of the county. Kittiwakes are only known to nest regularly on Lundy. There are no stations on the south coast; and this seems all the more extraordinary when we know that the bird is one of the most abundant of the Gulls in the South Hams district during winter, and that many admirable places where it might nest in safety are to be found there, especially between the Berry and Dartmouth. We are not at all surprised to know that the late Lord Lilford found a pair of Kittiwakes with their newly-fledged young on the Cod Rock, a little west of Berry Head; our only wonder is that the bird does not breed on the rocks there in abundance. Possibly the Herring Gull holds the locality too strongly for successful invasion by the weaker species. Black-headed Gulls, too, are our regular winter guests along the southern coasts, being particularly numerous at times along the entire range of Tor Bay. There is no breeding place of this beautiful little Gull in Devonshire, the nearest stations being in the adjoining county of Dorset. This bird may be seen in Tor Bay all the year round; we have

records for every month, but it does not appear in any numbers before the end of August or early in September. They stay about the Devonshire coasts until March or the beginning of April, when the black—or rather dark brown—head is fully assumed. We have several notes of the exceptionally early assumption of the dark head, from the beginning of January onwards, but the hood is by no means general before the end of February or early in March. Our young friend, Mr. W. Else, curator of the Torquay Museum, informs us that he saw a pair of these birds with full brown hoods on the 27th of November during the present year (1898). During the sprat season, in November especially, this Gull sometimes congregates in very large numbers about the seine-boats and the fish quays, fluttering to and fro, eagerly waiting for any of the spoil that it may chance to see within reach. We have seen the Black-headed Gull seize a sprat lying on the surface of the water and carry it off, followed by several Herring Gulls which chased and buffeted the poor bird until it was compelled to drop its prize, when one of the larger Gulls would secure it and then in its turn become the pursued. Black-headed Gulls are very

fond of fishing close inshore, and often ascend our rivers up to and even beyond tidal limits. They also show a decided preference for resting upon the sea rather than upon the shore. These birds are often remarkably tame, especially when flying about singly. We have seen it perch upon the coping of the Bath Saloons in Torquay and allow people to pass it within arm's-length, and dash down to the water if a piece of bread or a biscuit were thrown in. The Common Gull is another well-known and numerous winter visitor, residing with us from the end of August until the following April. Of course, it never remains to breed in Devonshire; indeed there are no known nesting places of this Gull in England, which is rather a remarkable fact, seeing that it breeds in Ireland. This bird may be met with on most parts of the coast between Plymouth and Exmouth, but shows a decided preference for estuaries and bays.

The Herring Gull and the three last-named species may often be seen mingled in large flocks round the shores of Tor Bay during the winter months. Gulls are sometimes exceptionally numerous here after the heavy easterly gales that from time to time beat in from the Channel

with resistless fury. Brixham harbour is another favourite place of congregation; and we have seen them there, and along the sandy reaches of the coast round the bay, assembled in thousands drifting about like a living snowstorm or standing in dense masses. Large companies of Gulls often settle upon the sands about low water, waiting for the tide to turn, when they begin to feed, and continue doing so until the flood. They are also partial to congregating upon low reefs of rock. There is a small reef in particular off the Torr Abbey sands, visible at low water, upon which these birds love to congregate, to rest and preen their plumage. Favourite feeding places, especially for the Herring Gulls, are at the various sewage outfalls round Tor Bay. A few Herring Gulls endeavour to nest in Tor Bay, but the great breeding station is beyond Berry Head; of this, however, more anon. The Terns are passing migrants only, mostly keeping off shore, and best described in our notes on bird-life at sea (cf. p. 245).

We may here call attention to the fact that Rooks, Crows, and Jackdaws very often visit the beach, and obtain a large amount of food from it.

The Crow is a familiar visitor to the shore, where he prys about for anything suitable to eat, living or carrion, well representing the Hooded Crow in other localities. The Rook is not content with searching the sands and mudflats, but occasionally flies above the sea and drops down to pick up any scrap of suitable food that he may chance to discover. We have seen this happen in Tor Bay between Corbyn Head and the Torquay pier—not once, but many times in succession. The Herring Gull is also a great scavenger of the shore, feeding greedily upon any carcass of bird, fish, or animal that may be cast up by the tide. When the fleet puts into Tor Bay—as it usually does every summer—the ships are constantly attended by flocks of this Gull, all the refuse being eagerly picked up, sometimes the hull of a huge ironclad being almost vignettied in a swarm of fluttering Gulls.

Bird-Life upon the Cliffs.



RAVEN.—STAR POINT.

CHAPTER VIII.

BIRD-LIFE UPON THE CLIFFS.

A LARGE proportion of the Devonshire coast is composed of rolling precipitous downs and long reaches of cliffs, many of them hundreds of feet in sheer depth. It would be difficult to find more grandly romantic scenery round the English coast, many of the headlands being exceptionally fine, jutting out in rugged majesty to the blue waters of the Channel, or receding into deep land-locked bays surrounded by wooded hills and dales and some of the fairest and richest pastures in the world. But, singular to relate, these majestic cliffs appear to have little attraction for sea-birds, and the entire coast of the mainland of Devonshire cannot boast a single grand haunt of these fowl. The only place approaching to the vast bird colonies of more northern coasts is Lundy Island, whilst the cliffs of the south coast of the county,

with this solitary exception, are the richest in avine inhabitants. We have no stirring descriptions to give of cliffs white with struggling birds, no animated scenes to witness such as remain graven on the tablets of memory after watching bird-life in St. Kilda and many another haunt of fowl, no visits to pay to the wonderful earthworks of Puffin or Shearwater—the rocks and downs of Devon in comparison with these seem tenantless and deserted. The cliffs of the Devonshire coast must therefore be regarded more as hunting grounds than as show places for the ornithologist—as minor sets, rather than grand *mise-en-scenes* in the stirring drama of bird-life. The avine riches of our coast—such as they are—must be sought for with an eye trained to ornithological observation; they are not palpable to every visitor, like those of so many bird stations elsewhere. Perhaps the following notes on the bird-life of our cliffs in this southern county may therefore be of service to the novice or to more experienced visitors new to the locality.

The Herring Gull is the only sea-bird that nests upon the cliffs along the entire range of the South Devon coast. Odd Guillemots and

Razorbills are said to do so, but we have no direct evidence to confirm the statement. Perhaps the most important colony of Herring Gulls is situated between Berry Head and Kingswear, the birds congregating in greatest numbers in the immediate neighbourhood of the headland. That we have no single crowded breeding station of these Gulls along the coast is very possibly due to the abundance of suitable nesting-places; in fact, nearly all the rocky coast-line from Torquay to Plymouth is a breeding resort of the Herring Gull, in most places the birds being distributed in scattered pairs, but here and there massed in considerable numbers. So far as our experience goes, this special colony of Herring Gulls behind Berry Head is the largest we have seen anywhere in the British Isles; its numbers, however, have been reduced of late years, owing entirely, we believe, to the persecution of egg-hunters from Brixham and adjacent villages. Almost every accessible nest is pillaged, those only on the steepest and overhanging portions of the cliffs having any immunity from these human marauders. The Herring Gulls begin nesting in May. The nests are made on the

ledges and in nooks and fissures in all parts of the cliffs. Some are placed on the downs quite easy of access, but these are in almost every case significantly empty. When disturbed, the birds rise in a fluttering throng, persistently uttering their monotonous notes, and the excitement continues as long as human intruders remain. These birds become much more bold and noisy when the young are hatched. We have often concealed ourselves under the thorn and bramble which in some places overgrows the cliffs, and watched the actions of these Gulls when their young have been on the ledges in the vicinity. For hours at a time the parents of the young we were nearest to have circled above us, every now and then swooping past the face of the cliff, and occasionally almost brushing our head with their wings, all the time uttering their noisy clamour. By the aid of a field-glass, many charming peeps at this Gull's domestic arrangements may be obtained along the cliffs in this particular locality. Early in the season the brooding birds may be watched sitting here and there upon their nests. These for the most part are flimsy structures, mere hollows lined

with grass and straws or turf, and sometimes the bare ground alone is the resting-place for the two or three eggs. Then later on the nestlings may be seen. The young Gulls remain upon the cliffs until they are fledged, but they do not keep in the nest, wandering out on to the ledges close by, and here they may be seen sitting motionless as the rock itself until the old birds arrive with food.

Another interesting bird that breeds in some numbers all along the south coast of Devonshire is the Shag. Many Shags nest in the midst of this colony of Herring Gulls, selecting holes and fissures in the cliffs, places as a rule quite inaccessible to man. Many such breeding places may be detected with the aid of the field-glass. We remember one hole in particular, where every year the young Shags may be seen craning their long necks out, waiting for their parents to bring them food. The coast between Berry Head and Kingswear is a noted haunt of this species. There are many isolated rock masses, some of them mere reefs at low water, and on these the Shags delight to gather and preen their plumage. We have often seen these rocks literally black

with basking Shags, each with wings raised and outspread, birds at intervals arriving from and departing to the surrounding sea ; and when the flock has been disturbed it was most interesting to watch the great mass of lumbering birds slowly rise and fly out towards the open Channel. The Cormorant is also a fairly common bird all along the coast, repairing to the cliffs to breed. This bird and its relative the Shag are the outcasts of the sea-birds here, the two species to which the Bird Protection Acts afford no safety, because of their poaching tendencies about the estuaries of the salmon rivers. The Cormorant, as a rule, fishes in deeper water than the Shag ; anyway, the latter species is by far the most frequently seen below the cliffs diving for food close inshore. The Cormorant becomes more numerous between Hope's Nose—the eastern headland of Tor Bay—and Exmouth. This species is a familiar one to the railway passenger between Dawlish and Teignmouth ; and often have we remarked a company of Cormorants sitting on the summit of that weather-beaten old rock pillar known locally as "the Clerk," of which the traveller catches hasty glimpses as the train dashes out

of the series of short tunnels that pierce the red cliffs between these two small watering-places. The winter storms of the last few years, however, have left their traces upon the Clerk Rock, standing alone amongst the heaving waters some distance from its parent cliffs, and the time now seems not far distant when it will topple over and disappear for ever—a familiar landmark gone. We have often watched the Shags coming home at nightfall to their ancient roosting places on the Oar Stone and Thatcher Rocks in Tor Bay; strings of them flying along swiftly and silently just above the waves, and retiring for the night into the many clefts and fissures of these weather-beaten rocky islets. The Gannet, another member of this family, is known as a visitor only to the south coast of Devon. Its solitary breeding place in the county is on Lundy Island. We shall, however, have more to say about this species in the following chapter. Whether any of the Shearwaters breed upon the south coast of Devon we are as yet unable to say. The birds are common enough in the Channel, and there are many spots where a few pairs might breed and never be detected. This

was certainly the case with the Stormy Petrel, which was discovered to breed on the Oar Stone in Tor Bay by my late old friend Else; whether it does so elsewhere along our coast is not yet known, but there can scarcely be any reasonable doubt that such is the case. The above short list exhausts the sea-birds breeding on the mainland of the south coast of Devonshire. Of land-birds, however, there are not a few, and some of them very interesting species. These we now propose to glance at, beginning with the Raptores.

It affords us more than ordinary pleasure to be able to record the Peregrine Falcon as still indigenous to Devonshire. Notwithstanding almost ceaseless persecution the bird somehow manages to hold its ground, and eyries are situated here and there along the coast. We often meet with this fine Falcon in our journeys along the cliffs, especially in autumn, when a good many birds of this species pass along the coast on migration. We have also seen it along the downs between Babbacombe and Shaldon, while it has been recorded as nesting on the fine cliffs at Watcombe, just outside Torquay. The Raven from

time immemorial has bred on these cliffs too, or did so up to quite recent years. We ourselves saw a pair there in 1895. Our experience of the Peregrine in Devonshire is confined to the South Hams, and there are certainly several nests between Tor Bay and the Start. We heard this year that the young are obtained almost every season in the Bolt Head district. One of our most charming experiences with the Peregrine Falcon occurred during the summer of 1898, when we stumbled quite accidentally upon a nest, the whereabouts of which we will not specify beyond saying that it is situated on a fine range of cliffs between Berry Head and Slapton. It was on the 4th of July, whilst watching the doings of the Herring Gulls as we lay concealed upon the face of the cliffs, that we suddenly caught sight of a brood of Peregrines on the face of the rock not fifty yards away. With a powerful binocular we could discern the markings on every feather equally as well as if we had held the birds in our hands. For quite an hour we watched their gambols on the cliffs, our presence quite unsuspected. There were four young birds, quite an exceptional brood, and they had evidently just left the nesting place

and were well able to fly. We first detected one bird, by its fluttering on the ledge of the cliff, and shortly afterwards we sighted the three others, all within an area of a few yards. They seemed to be spending their time in exercising their wings. First one would take a short flight to another part of the broken cliff, sometimes upwards, sometimes downwards; then another, and another would follow in succession—a sort of follow-my-leader game. Occasionally one of the birds flew to a stunted bush growing near the top of the cliff, poising with fluttering wings until it finally settled on the uppermost twigs, as lightly as a tuft of thistledown. Then another bird followed and tried to perch on the same small bush, with the result that both had to take wing. Every now and then the birds floated as it were in a butterfly-like manner to a lower level of the cliffs. Sometimes all of them were in motion together, more frequently one or two would stand quietly on the ledges whilst the others gambolled about. Not a trace of the old birds was seen. Either the brood had been deserted and left to take care of themselves—they were certainly strong enough upon the wing—or the more wary parents had dis-

covered us upon the cliffs and discreetly kept out of the way. There are keepers hereabouts who would have shot this brood down without the least compunction; and we have often wondered since how this happy family fared. It is not often that a nest of Peregrines hatch out like this, for the young are eagerly sought, and few broods along the coast escape the lynx-eyed climbers who harry every eyrie they can find for the sake of gain. Were the birds left in peace the Peregrine Falcon would soon become a familiar object all along the coast.

The Kestrel, of course, is the commonest rap-torial bird of these sea-cliffs. We have many pairs breeding regularly round the rock-bound shores of Tor Bay, and thence round the Berry towards the Start. There has been a nest to our knowledge seven years in succession in the cliffs above Goodrington Sands—in a spot absolutely inaccessible to man, a deep fissure where the rocks overhang and look so dangerous as if about to topple over at the least touch of a rope: indeed large masses of these cliffs fall every winter. Then there is almost always a nest on the little headland that juts out into the bay near the Torquay gas

works; others at Daddy Hole. This pretty Falcon may often be watched high in air above the cliffs breasting the stiff breeze that blows in off the sea, hovering and gliding, then drifting inland over the fields, anon beating up to windward, all the time in a perpetual flutter and tremble. When the young are hatched the old birds are most persevering in their efforts to keep them well supplied with food, the male and female visiting the nest at short intervals, dashing up and entering the fissure at full speed, like Swifts are wont to do. In this locality a favourite food of the Kestrel is the cockchafer. This insect is sometimes very abundant along the coast, swarms of them frequenting the tops of the hedges towards sunset. We have seen Kestrels charge again and again through these swarms, seizing the cockchafers with their claws and conveying them thus to the mouth without slacking their impetuous speed. Another raptorial bird that we still have with us in some numbers is the Common Buzzard. Many birds of this species are from time to time met with along the coast, and here and there a pair make their nests in the cliffs. The very characteristic soaring of this species once wit-

nessed cannot readily be forgotten. It is a bird-flight that impresses itself on one's memory. Several times in the immediate neighbourhood of Paignton we have been fortunate enough to see Buzzards engage in these soaring flights. We once fired at a Common Buzzard as it flew over Goodrington Sands. The bird was far out of range and flew away apparently unharmed, but its aerial journey was ample recompense to us for our disappointment in not bringing *Buteo* to bag. In ever-widening circles it mounted higher and higher into the air, making off in a north-westerly direction, all the time the spirals seeming to decrease in extent as the distance increased, until the bird was lost to view in the sky out towards Marldon. We have heard of a nest of this species during the present season (1898) between the Start and Plymouth. No Common Buzzards breed in the vicinity of Tor Bay, and the most likely time to meet with them in this district is in autumn. We have also repeatedly remarked that it by no means follows that the birds will breed in cliffs which they may have frequented on and off for months. This exhausts our list of cliff-haunting Raptores, although we may take the opportunity of mention-

ing here that the Osprey once upon a time (140 years ago) bred regularly on the white cliffs of Beer, beyond Exmouth. Nowadays, the Osprey is an irregular visitor only on migration to the tidal waters and large meres of Devon, although no examples have been recorded for many years. It is sad to reflect upon the absence of this fine bird from the county's ornis, especially as there are so many spots where it could have reared its young under most favourable conditions. The species is lost to us beyond recall, although it is satisfactory to know that the bird still breeds in Scotland, and that these last remnants of the indigenous race of British Ospreys are jealously guarded. When standing on our western headlands, we often look across the Channel, over the waste of sparkling waters to the line of white cliffs hull down on the north-eastern horizon, and think of those remote days when the "Fish Hawk" returned each season to them to rear its young, as Polwhele recorded a hundred years ago.

By far the commonest land-birds of the maritime cliffs is our old friend the Jackdaw. We have several very thriving colonies of Jackdaws round Tor

Bay, located in the lofty masses of weather-beaten red cliff, and very interesting they are to the lover of birds. At all times of the year their actions well repay observation. There is one large colony in the range of cliffs at Goodrington Sands, the same rocks to which we have just alluded in our remarks upon the Kestrel. Here at the summit of the cliffs is a secluded pathway upon which we often stand and watch the noisy birds come home to roost. They spend the greater part of the day upon the inland fields, but towards dusk assemble in a scattered flock and return to the cliffs. Frequently, before finally settling, they chase and buffet each other with a great uproar of cackling notes, sweeping past the face of the cliffs, then ascending high into the air, their cries ringing out in fitful peals, as if at some preconcerted signal. In springtime the scene becomes even more animated; the rocks are not so completely deserted during the daytime, and at the least alarm the birds leave the cliffs in a noisy throng, pouring out from the holes and crevices into the air to flutter and circle about or stand on every little prominence, filled with excitement and alarm. Many of the nests here must be of the most rudimentary propor-

tions, the holes and crevices not offering facilities for the huge pile of materials that a Jackdaw seldom fails to accumulate wherever possible. Few of the nests are accessible to man. There is another colony (decreasing) of Jackdaws across the bay at Daddy Hole, below the Coastguard Station, and here the nests are more easily reached. We have seen boys get their caps full of eggs on these cliffs by the most ordinary methods of climbing. But by far the most interesting colony in Tor Bay, in our opinion, is that on the cliffs near Saltern Cove, at Broad Sands. The rocks here rise from the beach for some distance like a wall, but above this they are clothed with a dense thicket of thorns, clematis, briars, ivy, and other plants. This under-wood also harbours many rabbits. There is a large hole or cave at the foot of these cliffs hollowed out in some very pretty crystallised rock. There are generally a few Jackdaws' nests built in the roof of this cave; many others are made in the holes of the cliffs above; but, most interesting of all, numbers are literally in the open air, placed under the dense growth of vegetation and amongst the ivy. It may be worthy of remark that Missel Thrushes not unfrequently nest in this thicket. Many nests of

the Jackdaw can be seen from the beach—huge piles of sticks, wedged in amongst the ivy and thorn. This colony formerly consisted of several hundreds of birds, but we do not think the numbers have been quite so large during the past few seasons. Here, again, one or two pairs of Kestrels breed amongst the Jackdaws on the same cliffs. Another bird of the Crow tribe still finds a home upon the cliffs of Devonshire. This is the Raven, a species that has disappeared entirely from many parts of the country. Ravens cannot, however, be considered common round our coasts, whatever they may have been half a century ago. Not very long ago we saw a pair of Ravens near the cliffs at Watcombe, flying across the valley, one afternoon in January, and making a great noise as they went, buffeting and toying with each other. Whether the Raven breeds in these cliffs at the present time we do not know, but the spot is a historic Raven haunt, and has been for more years than the oldest inhabitant can recall. This fine bird also nests every year in the cliffs farther westward, between Berry Head and Plymouth. We had several reported to us during the spring of 1898. Unfortunately, these nests are robbed wherever they can be reached, the

young birds finding a ready sale, and at prices we suppose sufficiently tempting to repay the risk. We should not like to see the Raven banished from the county, but the wanton destruction now going on will have to be stopped, otherwise this fine bird's day will eventually be over. Devonshire is one of the last great strongholds of the Raven in England, and surely steps should be taken to prevent the bird's utter extinction. As a pet bird the Raven has ever been held in high esteem, and we fear that this circumstance causes many a nest to be robbed that might otherwise have been left in peace.

The Chough also deserves passing mention. Formerly this handsome bird had many breeding stations along the rocky portions of the Devonshire coast, but nowadays it is one of the rarest and most local of the county's birds. We know of no breeding station on the south coast, although it is interesting to remark that eggs were found as recently as 1880 on Berry Head, and local specimens of the bird are in the museum at Torquay. Whether the species will ever again recover itself in the county seems doubtful, the combination of adverse circumstances against

which it has to contend being apparently far too strong for such to be the case.

Our next bird of the cliffs is the Stock Dove. Curiously enough, the Rock Dove is practically unknown. During a residence of eight years on the rocky coast of South Devon we have seen but one example of this species, and that was shot near Berry Head. The Rock Dove is said to have been found on both the north and south coasts of the county, but there seems to be some doubt as to whether they were the descendants of tame birds. The evidence, however, is fairly conclusive that this bird breeds on the north coast in a strictly feral state. The absence of such a bird as the Rock Dove is somewhat remarkable, seeing that the coast is so eminently suited to its requirements. On the other hand, the Stock Dove is not only a common and widely-distributed species along the coast, but is evidently on the increase. We can seldom wander far along the top of the cliffs, or below them on the beach, without disturbing these Pigeons from their retreats in the rocks; and in autumn and winter small flocks are by no means unfrequent upon the stubbles and other fields. Occasionally a bird is flushed from

the sea-weed covered rocks on the beach. It is a wild and wary bird, darting out of the cliffs with unexpected haste, and soon reaching safer quarters. This Dove also frequents the old workings of the iron-mines on the coast between Brixham and Kingswear. It nests in the fissures and holes in the rocks, in rabbit burrows on the cliffs, and even beneath gorse and other dense scrub in those situations. Stock Doves (and occasionally Ptridges) breed with the Jackdaws under the thickets on the cliffs at Broad Sands, and odd pairs of these Doves may be met with on the cliffs at Watcombe, Daddy Hole, and between Paignton and Brixham right round Tor Bay. The grunting note of this Dove is particularly loud and persistent in spring, continuing through the summer. Several broods are reared in the year.

Our Devonshire cliffs are also the haunts of several of the smaller Passeres. Both species of Martin find in them a favourite resort. The House Martin frequents the hard limestone cliffs especially, to which it can readily attach its cup-like nest. The Sand Martin regularly resorts to the red sandstone cliffs and steep banks, which are easily tunnelled for nesting purposes. This

latter species, perhaps because nesting places are so abundant, is very commonly distributed round Tor Bay during the summer, breeding for the most part in scattered pairs, but in one or two places congregating in small colonies. There is a colony near Corbyn Head, close to Torquay Railway Station ; we had another and much more extensive one at the Preston end of Paignton sands, until the cliffs were destroyed, partly by winter gales, and partly to make room for the sea-wall now in course of construction. Another small colony is situated in a soft sand-cliff close to the Paignton harbour, behind the inn there. These birds are sometimes seen both very early and very late in the season. With a view to any possible hibernation in this species, we have made it a rule for years to keep a close watch upon the cliffs during winter, especially on exceptionally mild and sunny days, but we have never had the good fortune to see a trace of the birds. We have also visited the cliffs when a fall has taken place, laying bare many yards of the face, but always with negative results. The House Martin is not so generally distributed, because suitable cliffs are not so common. The bird, however, may be seen breed-

ing here and there along the cliffs between Beer and Plymouth. There are a number of nests made on the wall-like cliffs at Berry Head, and a similar colony established on some rocks at Mudstone Sands, a mile or so west of that point. House Martins, when nesting on cliffs, show a special preference for those parts where the rocks overhang and form, as it were, a natural roof. There can be little doubt that these places were originally the only sites selected, and that the birds have considerably modified their habits since buildings became available. Both these little birds lend considerable animation to the cliffs; in not a few instances they are almost the only signs of feathered life, and their aerial gambols along the face of the rocks and above the sea are ever replete with interest.

Another bird found breeding in small colonies upon the cliffs is, singular to relate, the House Sparrow! There are two such colonies to our knowledge on the cliffs in Tor Bay—one at the Preston end of Paignton Sands, just above the target of the volunteer shooting range, the other at Corbyn Head, near Torquay. These Sparrows nest in holes in the cliffs, and, so far as we

can determine, never leave the locality or visit the towns and villages, obtaining their food from the beach and from the fields at the top of the cliffs. The Corbyn Head birds, however, are nearer to houses than the others, and may frequently be seen feeding upon the highway. We had an idea that these cliff Sparrows were more robust and larger birds than the ordinary type of Sparrow, but have not yet amassed sufficient material to come to any decided conclusion. Perhaps other observers may feel inclined to investigate the matter.

We may also mention that the Starling breeds in some numbers amongst the cliffs at Daddy Hole. We should, indeed, at the present time almost feel inclined to say that this species is now commoner there than the Jackdaw, although ten years ago the reverse was certainly the case. The decrease of the Jackdaw may possibly be attributed to the numbers shot by owners of Pigeons in the neighbourhood, the Daws, we are assured, attacking the latter, and wounding if not killing them outright. A few Hedge Accentors, Robins, Wrens, and Blackbirds also frequent and nest amongst the dense scrub and ivy that clothe parts of the

cliffs in this locality. We have also seen the Yellow Bunting and the Linnet there during the breeding season. This scrub in many parts of the cliffs is a favourite roosting place with small birds of various species.

In the preceding chapter we purposely omitted to mention the Rock Pipit, for although it is *par excellence* a bird of the shore, it is, as its name rightly implies, a species very closely identified with the rocks and cliffs. The Rock Pipit is a common resident along the entire Devonshire coast, in all localities suited to its requirements—rocky beaches and cliffs. The bird is never met with far from the shore; it is quite the most maritime of all our small Passeres. This Pipit is common enough round the south coast, and a bird that is one of the most familiar objects of the shore in our own particular neighbourhood. Ever tame and trustful, it may be watched flitting about the weed-draped rocks at low water, or rising with a startled *cheep* from the coarse sand and shingle, feebly flying a short distance and then alighting to watch our approach. Then it may often be remarked high up the broken cliffs, or even clinging to some small projecting piece

on the face of a wall-like rock. In autumn as likely as not it will be observed in small parties, flitting about the tangled *débris* of the shore; but as spring draws on the birds separate into pairs, and become associated with the cliffs and rocks still more closely. Often now as we wander along the shore the simple little song of the male bird will greet us, as likely as not from some boulder on the beach as from the lofty crags, for the bird is equally at home singing in either spot. It nests in May, and its home is usually most carefully concealed under a stone or clod of earth, or in some deep cranny in the rocks. Migratory Rock Pipits pass along the south coast of Devonshire in autumn and in spring. We have often remarked them at both seasons. Those shot in spring are suffused with a vinaceous tint on the underparts, which are practically unspotted. These differences may readily be remarked with the binocular. These individuals belong to the North European form of the Rock Pipit—a fairly distinguishable race, the *Anthus rupestris* of Nilsson. All these “red” Pipits, however, by no means belong to the latter race, for the ordinary form of the Rock Pipit is frequently met with in this neighbourhood

deeply stained with the red soil of the cliffs. The spotted underparts, however, are said to be a constant point of distinction. We should remark that the two races are practically indistinguishable in autumn and winter plumage.

Another very interesting bird that frequents the rocky coast of South Devonshire from Teignmouth to Plymouth is the Black Redstart. This district must be regarded as quite one of the winter resorts of the species, and it may be met with here and there singly or in pairs in certain recognised resorts. This bird is much overlooked and thought to be rarer than is actually the case. In the first place, it is a shy and retiring creature, delighting to conceal itself the moment it is alarmed; and in the second place, observers—at least competent ones—are by no means plentiful along the rock-bound coast in winter time. Below Berry Head and the sheltered range of cliffs where the Jackdaws breed at Goodrington may be mentioned as two pretty safe localities for a “find” between October and April. We have also seen this species about Hope’s Nose; but its favourite haunts are broken cliffs with a south aspect, where insects may be obtained all the winter through. It is a thorough

little rock bird, rarely if ever perching in trees or bushes, and seldom wandering far from its retreat all the winter. We have often searched closely for this Redstart in summer in the old familiar winter haunts, but without success, and we do not believe that there is yet any well authenticated instance of its breeding in our islands. It is difficult to believe that the Black Redstart has become much more abundant in Devonshire during the last half-century or so. The bird was not discovered in the county until the winter of 1833 (at Teignmouth); but this seems due to want of observation. Field naturalists were much scarcer in those days than they are now, and such a skulking little species could easily be overlooked, especially in such localities as it elects to frequent during its sojourn on our shores. One more interesting cliff-breeding species is the Swift. The bird is a common one in most parts of Devonshire, arriving at the end of April and leaving us most regularly on or about the 10th of August, although we have several late September records. The only locality, however, where we know that it breeds on the cliffs is at Berry Head. All the summer through

the bird is abundant on the flat summit of this noble headland, but only a few pairs, comparatively, nest in the cliffs. The instance is an interesting one, and we should like to know if there are other similar stations in the county, beyond that of Beer, which was recorded in the *Zoologist* for 1872. The Common Kingfisher is not unfrequently met with about the rocky beaches and outfalls; we have seen it and the Heron fishing within a few yards of each other.

The last species that we propose to notice in connection with the cliffs is the Green Woodpecker. This may seem a queer locality to meet with a species that is popularly supposed to be inseparably associated with trees; yet so frequently do we come across this Woodpecker on the cliffs, that we regard the occurrence as unworthy of written record. We speak particularly of the coast of Tor Bay between Livermead and Broad Sands. Not only does the Green Woodpecker frequent the cliffs at all seasons of the year, but we have one instance of its actually breeding there, in preference to trees which might have been had within a hundred yards of the spot.

Possibly the bird breeds regularly in these situations, seeing that it is so commonly observed in them. Only the other day—we mention this as a fairly representative instance—we watched a Green Woodpecker for some time searching for food upon a steep broken cliff. We were first attracted by the gleaming yellow of its upper plumage, as it went along before us in dipping flight, and clung to the bare red earth. After remaining quite still for a few moments—it was a male in splendid plumage—it began to run here and there about the ground, with long tail depressed, and supporting the body as it clung to the steep bank, and from the peculiar motion of the head—distinctly seen through our binocular—the bird was evidently feeding. Then it flew a few yards farther along the cliff, and took several long hops upwards, and again began to feed. At last we suppose it detected us, and uttering its loud, clear, laughing cry, it took wing, and we lost it round a corner of the rocks. Hereabouts Green Woodpeckers seem to obtain almost as much food from the ground as from the timber, judging from the frequency that we flush them from the former situation. We should perhaps mention

that the favourite parts of the cliffs are where loose soil is abundant; upon the hard rock face we do not ever remember seeing it. Sufficient, we hope, has been said to illustrate not only the wealth of bird-life upon these grand old Devonshire sea cliffs, but the exceptional interest of many of the observations that may be made in such a locality. These birds of various species are a fitting ornament indeed to some of the grandest maritime scenery that England can boast—company that always interests us and increases our pleasure amidst such romantic surroundings.

Bird-Life at Sea.



BIRD GATHERINGS.—TOR BAY.

CHAPTER IX.

BIRD-LIFE AT SEA.

As in most other respects concerning the haunts of birds, Devonshire is equally fortunate in its maritime attractions for the feathered tribe. The waters surrounding so much of the county are adapted to the requirements of almost all types of aquatic birds. We have shallow seas, and muddy and sandy estuaries, where the water is yellow and soupy; deep water close in shore under the cliffs; and moderate soundings away from land, with a rocky or sandy bottom, and clear as crystal—where each particular species can obtain the food it desires. During autumn and winter especially, the wanderer round the coast interested in bird-life, so long as he confines his rambles and his observations to the land, can form but a poor idea of the avine riches of the district a mile or so from shore. These remarks

particularly refer to the large sweeping bays and land-locked estuaries on the southern coast, which are the most important haunts of water-birds in the county during winter. During a stiff easterly gale, birds of many species are driven in nearer to the land, and the beach is sometimes strewn with their dead bodies, telling of the severity of the weather off the coast, and giving us an indication of the variety and the abundance of the bird-life at sea.

The marine bird-life of our own beautiful Tor Bay may be taken as fairly typical of all that will be met with anywhere else along the south coast of the county. It would be difficult to find a more romantic spot round the English coast, the scenery, in which it rests like a brilliant jewel of varying hues, according to atmospheric conditions, when viewed from the centre of the bay, being most imposing. The noble outline of the land, from Hope's Nose and the Oar Stone on the right hand or north, to the red and grey cliffs of Berry Head on the left hand or south, includes as grand and varied a sweep of coast-line as any that can be found in England, and in no way suffers by comparison with the more widely famous (because

better known) bays of Naples and Venice! Beginning on the north, the eye is arrested by the bold promontory of Hope's Nose (a favourite spot for Kingfishers), with its attendant satellites the Lead Stone, the Oar Stone, and the Thatcher, on the latter of which, by the way, is an example of a raised beach, another being situated on the mainland nearly opposite. Nearer Torquay there is a short reach of shingly beach; then the coast resumes its rocky aspect past the Shag Rock and the curious natural arch known locally as "London Bridge," on to the harbour. Between this and the station the bay is enclosed with a fine pile of limestone rocks, below which is the Terrace Gardens, famous for their palms and other exotics growing in the open air, and a long reach of sands (at low water) round to Corbyn Head, where again the red cliffs assert themselves, past Livermead to the famous Preston and Paignton sands, considerably more than a mile in length. Then, again, the coast is rocky beyond Roundham Head to another fine length of sands at Goodrington. Beyond these again there is one almost continuous range of cliffs, here and there faced with a bit of shingly and pebbly beach

(as at Broadsands and elsewhere), or indented with charming little coves, right round past Brixham to the boldest mass of all, which culminates in Berry Head. Inland, the country rolls away towards Dartmoor in a series of wooded hills and dales and green pasture-lands, amongst which hamlets nestle and church spires stand sharply out against the sky. So much for Tor Bay, the boast and the pride of all who are privileged to dwell by the side of its blue sparkling waters ; now for the birds that frequent it.

There is little variety in bird-life at sea off the South Devon coast during summer. A few Stormy Petrels and Manx Shearwaters may be observed ; now and then a stray Guillemot or Razorbill is seen. Tor Bay, is no exception to the rule. Its most conspicuous birds between April and July are the Herring Gulls that breed in such plenty in the neighbourhood, as we have already described. A few Cormorants, and a greater number of Shags, of course frequent the bay, and we know the Stormy Petrel does so all the year round, for it nests upon the Oar Stone, and doubtless elsewhere in the vicinity. As the autumn approaches, however, birds become more

plentiful; the variety of species rapidly increases, and from this time onwards to the following spring Tor Bay is certainly as favoured as a bird station as any other place along the coast. Among the first arrivals in the Bay in early autumn must be mentioned the Gulls. The most abundant of these early visitors is the Black-headed Gull, which arrives in flocks in August; following this species comes the Common Gull and the Lesser Black-backed Gull; while the Kittiwake is generally the latest, not appearing in any numbers before the sprat season begins in October. All these Gulls may be seen congregating about the seine boats and hookers in the bay, although much of their food is obtained closer inshore. The fine Black-backed Gull is principally a winter visitant to the bay, and not often seen near the coast except during a continued spell of rough weather. In late autumn and in winter Skuas may be met with in the bay; these birds, however, are pelagic in their habits, rarely come right in to the coast, and are generally observed well out from shore or about the whiting grounds off the bay. Examples of three out of the four British species have been obtained in Tor Bay.

The solitary exception is the Common Skua, a species which always keeps well out to sea. The two most frequent visitors to the bay are the Pomarine Skua and Richardson's Skua. Rough weather drives these birds off the fishing-grounds in the open Channel and they seek refuge in the various bays along the coast. They then at times appear here in considerable flocks, and may be watched chasing the Gulls to and fro in a raptore-like way, compelling them to disgorge the fish they have captured, which are generally seized before reaching the water. In fine open weather these Skuas keep well off the land, but when they are migrating in spring and autumn they are often reported to us by the fishermen. Buffon's Skua is by far the rarest of the three, and, like the Waxwing, occasionally visits the seas round the south coast in exceptional numbers. The autumn of 1891 was specially remarkable for the visitation of this Skua, but although numbers were observed near Plymouth we neither saw nor heard of an example being obtained in Tor Bay or its immediate vicinity. In spring and autumn the Terns pass along well off the coast, but a

very small number enter the bays. We have seen flocks of these birds so migrating when off Berry Head, when not a single Tern could be discovered in the bay close inshore. Migrations of these birds may therefore often be in progress without any knowledge of the fact being obtained from the land. Both Arctic Terns and Common Terns so migrate. We have seen parties of both species out at sea, when we have been on Berry Head; and this shows that the birds may often pass along the coasts in a direct line, from headland to headland, without entering the bays at all. The handsome Sandwich Tern is much rarer in the bay, but we have both spring and autumn records. Birds of this species were reported to us by a competent observer during the spring of 1898. The Lesser Tern must also pass the mouth of Tor Bay regularly in spring and autumn, on its way to breeding stations in Dorset and elsewhere. As an indication of the attractiveness of this locality for birds, we may mention that one or more examples of the following species of the Gull family have been obtained or identified in Tor Bay. Commencing with the Terns, we have the Black Tern, and

just possibly the Whiskered Tern. An example of the latter species has been recorded from Paignton, but its *bona-fides* are not considered satisfactory. An example of the Caspian Tern has also been recorded from Tor Bay. Coming to the Gulls, the record of rare captures is still more extraordinary. The only Devonshire specimen, we believe, of the Ivory Gull was shot in this bay, and is now in the Torquay Museum; wherein also are specimens of the Iceland Gull, obtained in the same locality. The Glaucous Gull has several times occurred there, and so too has the Little Gull, an example from Paignton being in the Torquay Museum. Sabine's Gull is also an abnormal visitor to Tor Bay, where two or three examples have been obtained.

Some of the most pelagic of our avine visitors are the birds of the Auk tribe. Guillemots, Razorbills, and Puffins prefer the open sea for the greater part of the year, seldom showing much inclination to come near the land save when breeding or when driven shorewards by stress of weather. Large numbers of these birds seek shelter in the coves and bays during the prevalence

of gales, but a return of more genial conditions soon sends them off again to the open sea. Although none of these Auks breed along this part of the Devonshire coast, two of them are well-known species in our local waters from autumn until the following spring. Perhaps the most abundant of these is the Guillemot, but flocks of the Razorbill are not uncommon well out in the bay, and at the fishing-grounds still farther in the Channel. Odd Guillemots and Razorbills are frequent all the winter here and there in Tor Bay, sometimes entering the harbours at Torquay; and assemblages of both species may at times be seen close inshore when the sea in the Channel is exceptionally rough. They are both very interesting species, their gambols on the water, their sudden dives, and occasional flights in long strings above the sea, never failing to attract our notice. These birds can obtain food in very deep water; whether they visit the bottom when diving in such a locality we are not able positively to say, but judging from the time that they remain under the surface we should feel disposed to think so. A very curious and beautiful example of the

Guillemot was obtained in Tor Bay in December 1883. It came into the possession of my late old friend Else. It is a perfectly white bird, and so far as we know a unique specimen. Else mounted it with special care, and it is now one of the treasures in the Torquay Museum. In connection with this, it is interesting to remark that a white Guillemot was seen at the Farne Islands during June and July 1881: possibly this may have been the identical bird shot in Tor Bay a couple of years later. Curiously enough, a sand-coloured example was obtained in Tor Bay at a later date, shot by Else himself, and this too may be seen in the same fine collection of local birds. The Black Guillemot is only an occasional visitor to our local waters, but Tor Bay is one of the favoured localities for it. This species, of course, does not breed anywhere round the coast of Devon or Cornwall; in fact, as some readers are doubtless aware, its only English nesting place is on the Isle of Man. It is a common bird, however, in Scotland, where we have had a considerable experience of it during the breeding season. It is somewhat singular that we so rarely see the Puffin in South Devon. This comical little bird

breeds in countless numbers no farther away from us than Lundy Island; and yet, during a residence of eight years on the south coast, we have never seen an example in Tor Bay, and not more than half-a-dozen in the open Channel. Puffins are very pelagic birds, the most so of the Auk tribe, and after the breeding season is over go right out to sea. In this respect they very closely resemble the Petrels. The Puffin, however, has been obtained in this bay, and local specimens are in the museum at Torquay. The little Auk is not a much rarer bird in winter in this part of Devonshire. Odd birds are sometimes driven upon the coast by storms; several examples have been obtained in Tor Bay, and a local specimen is in the museum. All these three last-named species must be regarded as comparatively rare birds in the English Channel.

The seas off this part of the Devonshire coast must also be regarded as specially favoured by the Divers and Grebes. Tor Bay is one of the best winter resorts of the Great Northern Diver along the entire south coast of the county. It is a regular visitor to the bay in October, where it remains until March or April, and specimens

are obtained every season. Most of these examples, of course, are immature, or adults in non-breeding plumage; plain-looking birds, offering little attraction to the gunner beyond their size. It is to be regretted that so many of these birds are killed here for no purpose whatever. Indeed, not many gunners take the trouble even to bring them ashore; and we have more than once heard these so-called sportsmen tell of their chase and final butchery of this Diver after repeated shots, leaving its mangled body floating upon the water! At rare intervals, examples of the Great Northern Diver are obtained in the bay in full breeding dress. There is a magnificent specimen in this plumage in the Torquay Museum. Some winters these Divers are much more numerous than in others. The Great Northern Diver generally keeps well out into the bay, but from time to time it may be seen close inshore. Every winter a bird or two are seen quite close to the sands at Torquay; off Corbyn Head being, for some reason or other, a specially favourite locality. The bird seldom visits the land. During our entire residence in the locality we have only once met with a Great

Northern Diver on the shore; and mentioning this brings to mind a controversy we read somewhere in a recent periodical (and again in the *Ibis* for 1898) as to the attitude assumed by these birds when on the land. If we remember rightly, some writers asserted that the bird was never seen in an erect attitude, like a Guillemot or a Cormorant, but always recumbent with its underparts touching the ground. But, singularly enough, the only Great Northern Diver that we ever saw ashore in this district was standing bolt upright on the rocks. We watched it—a bird in immature plumage apparently—for quite half-an-hour, part of the time through a glass, as it so stood upon a weed-draped rock within a few inches of the sea, on the coast near Saltern Cove. We could easily have stalked and shot it in this attitude, for it remained in the same position motionless, except an occasional turn of the head, but we left it as we found it, unscathed and undisturbed. We should not have attached any particular importance to the attitude of this Diver, but it was the only example of these birds that we had seen on shore in the locality, and were thus impressed by the circum-

stance. We may also mention that while this volume was in the press our young friend Mr. Else saw a Great Northern Diver sitting bolt upright, like a Guillemot, on the rocks at Hope's Nose (on the 16th of December 1898). It immediately dived from the rocks into the water, where he eventually shot it, having to swim out to obtain his prize. In the *Ibis* for 1897 (p. 264) it is recorded that at a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club (held 27th February of that year), Mr. H. M. Wallis exhibited a sketch of a bird believed by him to have been a Diver, which he had observed sitting in an erect attitude. It appears, on the other hand, that Divers in captivity in the Zoological Gardens in London and elsewhere were never seen to stand in an upright position. There is a very interesting paper on the terrestrial attitudes of Loons and Grebes by Dr. R. W. Shufeldt in the *Ibis* (1898, p. 46), in which the ventropodal position is apparently claimed for these birds. Against this being universally the case we have the observations of Audubon, which confirm our own. Whichever may be the most normal position, we have ample evidence to prove that an erect posture is by no

means impossible, or even very unusual. The Black-throated Diver is decidedly rare in Tor Bay, by far the least common of the three British species. The Red-throated Diver, however, is a well-known bird at sea in this locality, coming in late October and remaining with us till the following March or April. The "Sprat Loon" well deserves its local name; and we have often remarked the unusual numbers of these birds in the bay when sprats have been exceptionally abundant. Indeed, these fish are sometimes so common here as to be unsaleable, except for agricultural purposes. Then the Divers fare right sumptuously, and the bay is dotted with birds—only to be seen though by the aid of a boat—busily engaged in diving after their finny prey. These Divers take wing with the greatest reluctance, and we have sometimes seen them sink low into the water until they have been practically submerged, evidently in the hope that our boat would pass them unobserved. They can swim fast, too, soon getting out of gunshot by this means alone; but if they find the pursuing boat gaining they dive, or rather *disappear*, in the twinkling of an eye.

Four out of the five British species of Grebes are more or less regular visitors to Tor Bay. Of these the Red-necked Grebe and the Black-necked or Eared Grebe are by far the rarest, and we should consider them merely as abnormal migrants to the bay, if not to the whole of the south coast of Devonshire. There are, so far as we know, no records of either species in Tor Bay of recent date. On the other hand, the Great Crested Grebe and the Slavonian or Horned Grebe may be regarded as regular winter visitors to this part of the Channel. Of the two, we consider the Great Crested Grebe the more numerous. They generally frequent the bay in small parties of about half-a-dozen individuals, probably a brood and their parents. A favourite part of Tor Bay for this species is on the south side of Roundham Head; and as this promontory runs some distance into the bay, unusually good opportunities of observing these birds may often be had. It is somewhat remarkable how closely these parties of Grebes will keep to one particular part of the bay. They spend most of the hours of daylight seeking for food, diving at intervals like a Shag, swimming hither and thither, sometimes close up

in a compact party, at others scattered about the water. We never observed all the birds under water at the same time; one or two always remain upon the surface as if on the look-out. When threatened by danger they have a way of rapidly swimming out towards the open water, and if the pursuit becomes too hot, they dive at once and reappear far away from the approaching danger, repeating the action time after time until a place of safety is reached. We have sometimes known this Grebe to remain with us in spring until the full nuptial ornaments have been assumed. When moulting in autumn, their quills drop out so rapidly that the birds are for some time quite unable to fly. At all times these birds take wing with apparent reluctance, knowing full well that their greatest chance of safety is in the water, where, we may remark, they swim and dive with as much agility as the fish themselves. The Slavonian Grebe we often meet with in Tor Bay, its general habits very closely resembling those of the preceding species, but perhaps it shows less inclination to come inshore. Slavonian Grebes are later to arrive, and leave us, we think, somewhat earlier than Great Crested Grebes. Birds in

nuptial plumage are not often seen in Tor Bay, but the local museum contains an example in that dress.

Little need be said of the Cormorants and Shags that haunt the sea in this neighbourhood beyond what we have already written. Both species frequent the sea here all the year round, their abundance or scarcity depending to a great extent upon the movements of the fish on which they feed. But there is another and more interesting member of the Pelican family that is a pretty frequent visitor to Tor Bay, and that is the Gannet. We have records of this species in here from October to May. The birds are never very numerous, the most we have seen together being a dozen or so. They are, however, more abundant in the open Channel, and appear only to visit the bays in numbers when following the shoals of herrings and sprats that come shorewards in winter. Many a pleasant hour have we passed in watching the movements of these birds in our spacious bay. Gannets are hungry birds, and always seem bent on fishing. It is a grand and imposing sight to watch them soaring far aloft in wide circles, sweeping round and round on

almost motionless wings, and then see them drop, or rather hurl themselves down into the water with such force that the impact may be distinctly heard a mile away. For a few seconds there is nothing visible but a cloud of spray and a patch of white water churned to foam by the heavy body falling from such a height; then the Gannet rises again and flaps slowly along the surface, rising higher and higher as he goes, until, in a series of circles, he gains sufficient altitude to essay another plunge. The custom of tying a fish to a floating piece of wood, so that the bird may strike it and either dislocate its neck or imbed its spear-like bill in the timber, prevails here as on many other parts of the coast where Gannets are seen. These birds may sometimes be seen soaring, Vulture-like, at vast altitudes above the water. They never, however, fly over the land, and after their appetite is appeased generally make off to the mouth of the bay and the open Channel. Immature birds are not often seen in here, but we have examined several examples in the speckled black and white plumage. Although the Gannet breeds at Lundy Island, off the north coast of Devon, we do not believe that the birds seen off

this part of the coast are from that locality, but rather from the Bass Rock—individuals that have wandered south in autumn, and *not* north-east round the Lizard. Mentioning the Gannets brings to mind a note we made on the 21st of October 1891, recording a somewhat remarkable scene. It reads as follows:—Razorbills fishing in small parties in Tor Bay, close inshore. We watched a party for a long time to-night—rain coming down in torrents, just before sunset. They were remarkably noisy, and their note exactly resembled the croak of a frog. Parties of *Sterna arctica* and *S. hirundo* in the bay, also fishing close inshore. Saw one of these birds sit for a long time on the cork float of a lobster pot. Gannets also fishing in here. Flock of Gulls flying in a rainbow, the birds looking just like bits of glass flashing to and fro—all around was gloom, and the sky shrouded with ink-black clouds. This latter fact, from its very novelty, so impressed itself upon our memory that the singular, even weird effect has never been forgotten, and we can recall it now as vividly as though it were taking place before our eyes again. In our long and varied experience of bird-life it stands unique.

Of the various birds of the Duck tribe that visit the coasts and seas of Devonshire, Tor Bay has its fair share. There are physical conditions that prevent this special locality from receiving the visits of these birds in the enormous numbers for which other and more favoured localities are noted, still Ducks, Swans, and Geese are one of the special features of the winter bird-life of this part of the county. We have no mudflats in the neighbourhood nearer than the estuary of the Teign, no sand-banks nearer than Exmouth, whilst large sheets of fresh water are entirely absent. Another disadvantage is the very limited amount of beach left exposed at high water, and another and perhaps more important one is the great amount of traffic on the waters of Tor Bay. The large and important fleet of trawlers having their headquarters at Brixham, to say nothing of the numerous seine-boats and "hookers" attached to Torquay, Paignton, and Babbacombe, are out and about the bay at all hours and in most weathers—a fact in itself which robs these shy birds of that seclusion in which they rejoice, and which is so essential to their assembling in any numbers. Then the poor birds are continually

being harassed by gunners in boats, and not a few of the trawlers carry a gun in the hope of a chance shot at the luckless fowl. All observers are agreed that wildfowling is not what it used to be, and that the vast flights of Geese and Ducks of the old days are never seen now.

The rarest, as they certainly are the most imposing and distinguished visitors in the present family, are the Swans. In severe winters and after prolonged gales we have occasionally seen a Swan in the bay here, but always too far off to allow of identification. Speaking of Swans, a rather unusual incident occurred during the past autumn (1898), towards the end of August. Just before dusk, and when the Paignton promenade was crowded with people enjoying the fine music discoursed by the Royal Italian Band, a flight of five Swans suddenly appeared, and the birds alighted on the sea just off the end of the pier. They remained here for a few moments, and then rose one after the other and flew steadily just above the water towards Livermead Point, close to Torquay. Here we watched them for some time through a glass, when they again rose and passed out towards the centre of the bay, where they were finally lost to

view in the evening gloom. We never saw them in the bay afterwards, and have no idea whence they came or whither they went. In 1897 the brood of Swans belonging to a pair of birds on the ornamental lake in the public park at Paignton were not pinioned, and eventually made their escape to the bay. They frequented the sea here for the greater part of the autumn and winter, and one of them we know was shot for a wild bird—a proceeding for which the rash gunner had to pay. We are not much better favoured by Geese. The only species that can be regarded as familiar in Tor Bay is the Brent Goose. We rarely have them here before November, and they remain with us until the following March or April. Sometimes flocks and small parties may be seen well in near the land, but their favourite resorts are several miles off shore between Berry Head and Hope's Nose. Rough weather sometimes brings them shorewards in considerable numbers. They must be very hardy birds to live at all on water that we frequently get here during the winter months. Blue and sparkling, and beautifully peaceful, is the normal aspect of Tor Bay in summer, or in the absence of easterly winds. With the wind off the

land the bay is mostly tranquil, but with a wintry gale beating in from the open Channel the aspect is very different. At high water the big white-crested rollers break upon the shore in fury, dashing up the cliffs in clouds of spray, and going completely over the breakwaters. The coast right round is outlined by a seething caldron of breakers, and great white-crested seas may be seen tumbling over on the horizon, or rising in white masses against the various headlands and cliffs; while big lumps of brown foam are blown along the sands like leaves in autumn. Yet in spite of all this the Brent Geese may be often seen far out in the bay, rising and falling like corks as they ride out the gale apparently unconcerned. We often watch them thus, noting how the incoming tide brings them nearer and nearer to the shore, when they rise from the waves and fly out again for some distance, to repeat the movement a little later on. We should say that in this district the Brent Goose is almost exclusively a night feeder. Sometimes odd birds are shot from the shore; we knew of three being so killed in one spot at different times during the winter of 1893-94. The Barnacle Goose is a rare visitor to the seas off the Devon-

shire coast. We have never met with this species in Tor Bay, although we have examined a pair shot presumably near Plymouth during the winter of 1898-99, and brought into that port by a trawler. It has been repeatedly observed at Slapton Ley.

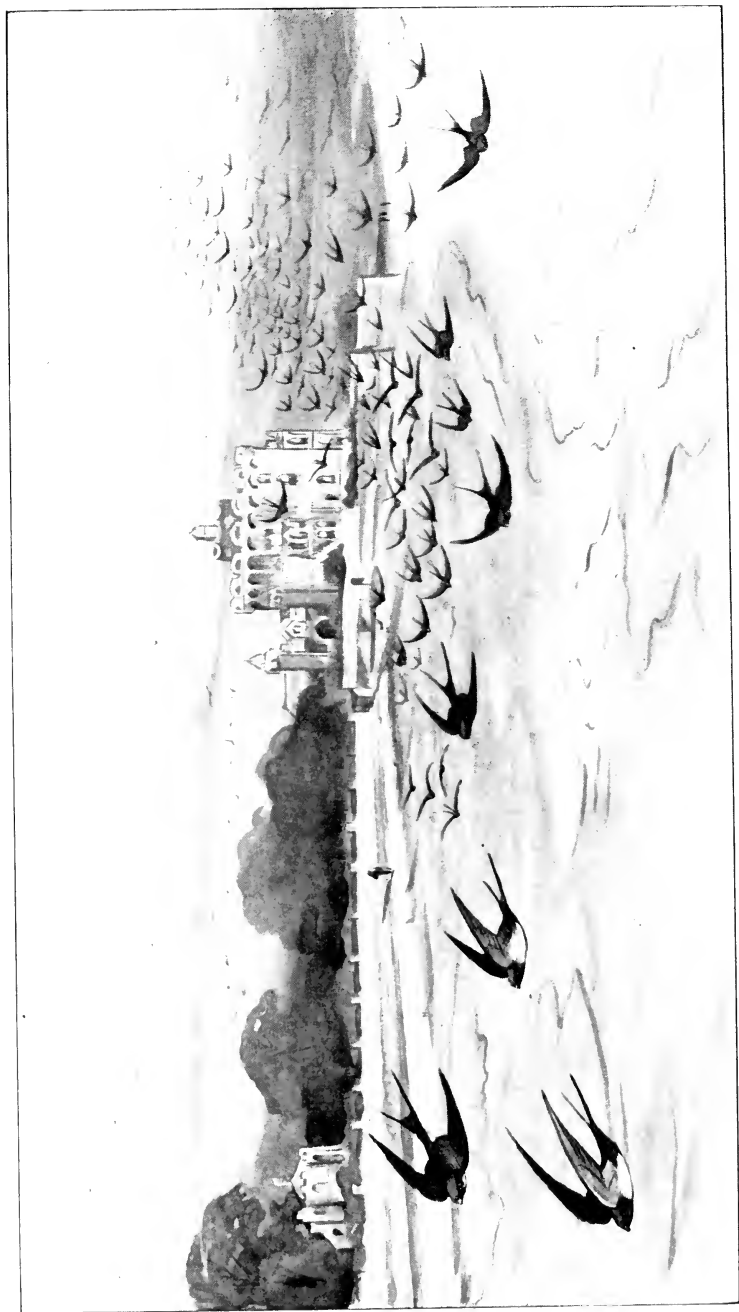
"Black Ducks" are the most familiar birds of the Duck tribe seen in Tor Bay during winter. Under this term are included the Tufted Duck, the Scaup, and the Common Scoter. Of these, the last-named is certainly the most abundant in this locality; but the Scaup is by no means uncommon, although it shows more partiality for the open water of the Channel. Flocks of Common Scoters sometimes make their appearance as early as September. Indeed, we saw a flock of "Black Ducks" in the bay during the past autumn as early as the middle of August, a very exceptional event. These birds rarely come close inshore; not even the most violent gales drive them to the land. They obtain their food in deep water by diving, and are always alert and shy, requiring considerable skill on the part of the boatman to get within gunshot. Scoters take wing somewhat readily, rising sometimes with a splash that can be heard a couple of miles away, and a large flock

will often fly about the bay for a long time after being disturbed, repeatedly seeming as though about to alight, but just as often continuing their course. Both Tufted Ducks and Scaups are often to be met with in flocks off the bay, and occasionally a few odd birds are shot about the headlands. The great companies, however, generally keep outside, or if venturing in to feed, do so under the cover of darkness. Occasionally the bay is visited by other species of Ducks, but the three above named are the most characteristic of the locality. Thus, for instance, the Pintail has been known to visit Tor Bay in some numbers, but many years ago; the Pochard pays us an occasional call (there is an example in the Torquay Museum); the Golden-Eye is sometimes recognised, and a specimen has been recorded; the Long-tailed Duck has occurred, once at least in a flock; the Harlequin Duck may possibly have visited us (cf. p. 290); an odd Eider has been obtained, and is now in the local collection; while both the Velvet Scoter and the Surf Scoter can claim Tor Bay records. The coast here is not suited to the requirements of such non-diving Ducks as Mallards and Wigeons, but these have already received attention in our notes on

bird-life elsewhere. We should mention, however, that the Red-breasted Merganser is sometimes seen during winter in Tor Bay; the only wonder is that it is not more abundant, for the coast in many places is eminently suited to it. The Goosander is an occasional visitor to this bay. A male example was seen and identified by my friend Mr. Charles Whymper, just off the Paignton pier, on the 15th of February 1899; others have been recorded. Curiously enough, so far as we know, the Smew has not yet been recorded from this locality, although it has been frequently obtained both north and south of it. We may remark, however, that Messrs. D'Urban and Mathew, in their *Birds of Devon*, have omitted to notice the female Smew which was obtained by Burt in Tor Bay, and which is now preserved in the museum of the Torquay Natural History Society. Of the Petrels that frequent the sea in this part of South Devon we can mention the Storm Petrel, which also breeds on islands in the bay; the Fork-tailed Petrel, which is not only sometimes observed at sea, but driven ashore here (there is a local specimen in the Torquay Museum obtained after a storm in the autumn of 1891); the Manx Shear-

water, which, if it does not enter Tor Bay in any great numbers, is certainly common enough outside ; and lastly, the Great Shearwater, of which several examples have been obtained.

Migration in a Southern County.



SWALLOWS MIGRATING ALONG PAIGNTON SANDS (7TH, 8TH SEPT. 1898).

CHAPTER X.

MIGRATION IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY.

IT seems fitting to conclude a volume describing the ornithology of a county so specially favoured with bird-life as Devonshire with a chapter not only dealing with the phenomenon of avine migration in this area, but with a *resumé* of those commoner ornithological events by which the cycle of each recurring year is punctuated. After a residence of many years on the south coast of Devonshire we may fairly claim to have gathered some information on the subject; so that a brief sketch of the seasonal movements of birds over the county as we have remarked them year by year may possibly be of some interest and value to the reader. We say this more especially because our opinions will be found to differ in various important respects from those held by writers who have published works on the ornithology of the county.

The migration of birds over the extreme southwest peninsula of England is characterised by being more remarkable for what it omits than for what it actually includes. The absence of certain migrational phenomena is, however, a most important key to many apparent anomalies in the distribution and season-flight of birds. Unfortunately, the entire coast-line between Plymouth and the Varne Light-vessel off the coast of Kent, with the solitary exception of the station on Start Point, was not represented in the series of observations and reports made by light-keepers to the Committee appointed by the British Association to study the question of avine migration round the British Islands. But in the absence of such data we have many indications that the spring migration of birds into the south of England is much weaker in the west, where the sea is so much wider, than it is in the east, where the sea passage is narrow. As we have already pointed out in our volume dealing specially with the season-flight of British birds, but little migration is reported from the Start Lighthouse, the keeper stating "that very few birds are observed at his station." Then we have the fact that many of our

summer migrants are notably rare in the south-west of England, or even absent altogether from that area, which are commonly distributed or at least present in more easterly localities. Among such species we may mention the Redstart, which is very local west of Somerset and almost absent from South Devon; the Wheatear, which is only seen comparatively sparingly in spring, although farther east it literally swarms all along the area of the Downs; the Whinchat, which is even more local in Devon and Cornwall, but significantly commoner in Dorset; the Nightingale, absent altogether west of Somerset; the Lesser Whitethroat, very scarce and local in South Devon, and an abnormal migrant only to Cornwall; the Reed Warbler, absent from the entire south-west, except as an abnormal migrant; the Tree Pipit, decidedly more rare and local in the south-west than elsewhere, and significantly commoner in North Devon than in the south of the county; the Pied Flycatcher, only in limited numbers on migration, and might almost be classed as abnormal, seeing that there is no thoroughly authenticated instance of its breeding in Devonshire, and we ourselves have met with but one example during eight years of

observation; the Wryneck, said by some authorities to be a casual visitor only, although we are of opinion that it nests, if rarely, in Devonshire; the Corncrake, much rarer and more local in the county, only breeding sparingly in the south; the Kentish Plover, normally entirely absent, although we might have expected it to pass our entire southern coasts; the Wood and Green Sandpipers, much less frequent in the south-west than in the eastern counties. Now these facts are too palpable to be ignored, and suggest, beyond all possibility of doubt, that migration in the west of England is comparatively much weaker than it is farther east, and in the cases of not a few species is normally absent altogether. We maintain that these facts are not anomalies, but due to a certain fixed law of dispersal and migration, which forbids species in the Northern Hemisphere either to extend their area of distribution in a southerly direction or to migrate in that direction to breed. The species that are entirely absent from the south-west of England, including, of course, South Devonshire, and obviously only entering the British area farther east, would have to migrate south in

spring to reach that district; while the extreme localness or rarity of other species proves that they do not enter the country farther east and then migrate south-west, and that the much wider sea passage in the west is not only more fatal to the birds that cross it, but is essayed by a vastly less number of individuals. If these birds were equally common in the south-west of England as in more northern and eastern districts, we should find either a southern movement after entering our area, or as strong a migration across the wider portions of the English Channel as across the narrower portions, slightly more north and much farther east—two assumptions which have no facts whatever to support them. And yet we are gravely told in a work by Messrs. D'Urban and Mathew on the birds of Devon, that some of these summer migrants actually reach the extreme south-west of England after migrating across Europe and the German Ocean; entering the British area by the Wash, crossing the Midlands or central counties to the Bristol Channel, and then turning south into Somerset and Devonshire! It is difficult to believe that these are serious views and mature opinions; or that the

wonderful flights of arrows on the migration maps in this book are intended to represent anything but excursions into the wildest realms of imagination. These astounding views are not worthy of serious refutation; but we feel compelled to allude to them if only to show, and that very forcibly, under what an overwhelming burden of misapprehension the entire subject of migration struggles at the present time. We regret that such a useful and interesting work should have been marred by these wild theories and erroneous interpretations of some of the most elementary facts in the distribution and migration of birds. From the series of facts above given we may safely infer that not a single species exclusively entering the British Islands east, say, of Portland Bill breeds south of Dartmoor; that all species do not breed anywhere south of their point of entrance to our islands; and that all migrants breeding in the extreme south-west of England enter that area from continental land south of it, probably by way of Cape la Hague or the Channel Islands. The various headlands and estuaries on the south coast of Devonshire are the most important points of

ingress for our summer migrants, as they are for the departure of birds of passage in autumn. As elsewhere, migrating birds show the greatest partiality for the river valleys, and it is mostly by way of these—stretching in the county as they do chiefly from north to south—that Devon is crossed. That this is the case is strongly confirmed by the comparatively greater amount of migration that is witnessed up the Kingsbridge estuary, starting from Bolt Head and Prawle Point, the two most southerly headlands, than in any other part of the county. There is also much evidence to suggest that the Dart Valley is another important route into the county; the Exe another; while the general trend of the Teign estuary renders it perhaps the least frequented path of summer migrants round the entire coast. The Brixham headland is another important point of ingress and departure, migrants skirting Tor Bay and the surrounding country, and thus working north to the Newton Abbot and Teignmouth districts. From these various headlands and estuaries the tide of spring migrants enters the county and spreads north, east, and west, like an opening fan. Coasting migrants,

such as Terns and Gulls, Gannets, Auks, Divers, and some Waders, follow the shore, not always, however, entering the bays and estuaries, but passing along from one headland to another. Many Waders enter our area by the various southern estuaries, and cross the county almost in a direct line from south to north, as we have had abundant evidence from the cries of the migrating flocks passing over at night.

Equally as regards autumn migration, the phenomenon as witnessed in the county is quite in accordance with those laws of dispersal that are so well demonstrated by the spring birds of passage. The geographical position of the county is such that it normally receives none of those vast waves of migrants from the direct east that are such a prominent feature on our eastern seaboard south of Yorkshire. On the other hand, the tide of migration that sweeps the British Islands from the north-east spreads across Devonshire right down to the extremity of Cornwall. To these facts may be attributed the apparent anomaly that such a county as Devonshire, one of the mildest, if not the mildest, in England, is not specially remarkable for its Passerine winter migrants. These birds are far

more abundant in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and other parts of the Midlands at that season than they normally are in Devonshire. Before proceeding to give the general aspects of spring and autumn migration in the county, and more particularly in our own immediate neighbourhood, we would mention that Messrs. D'Urban and Mathew have expressed the deliberate opinion, in their work on the Birds of Devon already alluded to, that some of our summer migrants appear in the northern parts of the county before they do in the south. The Cuckoo and the House Martin are given as instances. So far as we can gather, this opinion is based upon the fact that the former bird is sometimes heard north of Dartmoor before it is heard at Exmouth. We are at a loss to see how such a conclusion can logically be drawn from this circumstance, which may be much more reasonably explained by the fact that the bird's note was detected by a competent observer in the north before it chanced to be heard in the south. The latter bird is said to reach Exeter before it appears at Exmouth, some ten miles to the south-east, but this surely is another case of the bird being overlooked; or it may be that the Exeter Martins

reach that locality by an inland route up the Dart and Teign valleys, and that the Exmouth birds come direct in from the sea. The average date of arrival of both birds in our extreme southern localities is quite in accord with that of their appearance farther north. We feel compelled to warn the student of migration against such hasty and erroneous deductions, put forward with authority in a work that aspires to be a standard one on the subject of bird-life in the county.

In Devonshire migration is much less marked in spring than in autumn, as is the case in all other localities, although perhaps not to such a great extent as farther north and east. In the first place, it is always more difficult to note the departure of a migratory species than to observe its arrival; and in the second place, the birds that leave us or visit us at that season are fewer than in autumn. The first sign of migratory movement in the county may be said to be apparent in February, with the departure of such species as have visited this area from the north-east during the preceding autumn. The next important feature of spring migration is the departure of those birds that only winter in the district, such

as the Redwing and Fieldfare, the Black Redstart, the Brambling, and the Short-eared Owl, which are on the move from February to April. In March a perceptible decrease of many shore birds is apparent; and during this and the following month these winter migrants take their departure north. The White-fronted Goose leaves us in March, but the Brent Goose, probably because it breeds so far north, delays its migration until April or even early May; the Teal, the Wigeon, and the Shoveler we lose in April; the three species of "Black Duck" pass north during March and April; at which date also the Red-breasted Merganser seeks its northern nesting places. Our two commonest winter Gulls, the Black-headed Gull and the Common Gull, depart in March and April, but the former is sometimes seen as late as May. The two Divers (Great Northern Diver and Red-throated Diver) take their departure in March; as also do the Slavonian and Great Crested Grebes, the latter, however, not unfrequently lingering till April. The wading birds move much about the same time; the Jack Snipe, the Dunlin, and the Sanderling leaving in March, but the Golden Plover and the Purple Sandpiper often linger into

April and May. There are also several species that pass the county on migration, both in going to and returning from their northern breeding grounds. This class of migration is initiated in February and March by the passage of the Spotted Crake; becomes more pronounced in April with the fleeting visits of such species as the Garganey, the Turnstone, and the Whimbrel; and perhaps assumes its greatest numerical strength in early May with the advent of Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Knots, Greenshanks, Redshanks, Bar-tailed Godwits, and still more Whimbrels. This month also marks the passage along the coast of the Common, Arctic, and Sandwich Terns. The characteristics of many of these migrations have been already described in previous chapters.

Migration, however, never seems to be going on in earnest to the ordinary observer until the first of the summer migrants to the county make their appearance. This return movement may be invariably remarked in March. Amongst these earliest arrivals we must place the White Wagtail. Another of our first migrants is the Wheatear, which usually reaches South Devon by the middle of March, although we have one Paignton record

as early as the 6th of that month (1895). Almost simultaneously the Chiffchaff appears in our southern hedges, orchards, and coppices, from the 18th to the 23rd of the month being a fair average date for him in this part of Devonshire; although in an exceptionally early year we heard of his familiar song on the 5th of the month (1895, the same season as the remarkably early arrival of the Wheatear was noted). Following this species very closely comes the Willow Wren, but it is never common hereabouts much before the middle or third week in April. Another occasional March migrant is the Sand Martin; odd birds sometimes being seen round sheltered parts of the coast in that month, but their usual time of passage is somewhat early in April. This latter month inaugurates migration on a much grander scale, and before its close by far the greater number of our spring visitors are back again in their old haunts. One of the earliest April arrivals is the Blackcap. We have, however, one solitary record of this bird's appearance in some numbers on the 28th of March (1896). Another is the Ring Ouzel; but this species, like the preceding, not unfrequently "enters an appear-

ance," as lawyers say, by the end of March. A third, but rather a rare one we regret to say, is the Hobby. Quite a large batch of summer birds have arrived in these South Devon haunts by the middle of April. Among these we must mention the Yellow Wagtail, the Whitethroat and the Grasshopper Warbler, the Tree Pipit, the Swallow, the Martin, the Common Sandpiper, and the Cuckoo. This latter bird is sometimes seen near Paignton before the middle of the month. In 1893 we recorded it on the 10th of April; in 1894 on the 11th; but in 1896 not before the 22nd, and in 1897 just one day later still. From the middle to the end of April is the migration period of the Whinchat, the Common Redstart, the Sedge Warbler, and the Garden Warbler, but not a few Grasshopper Warblers and Cuckoos steal back about this time. The end of the month brings us the Wood Wren, the Swift, the Nightjar, the Turtle Dove, the Quail, and the Corncrake. Our records of the Swift, for instance, during eight years' observation, range between the 26th of April and the 7th of May, so that the passage of these species generally lasts between those dates, or in the case of the Quail perhaps longer. Last of all

the migrant band to reach us is the Red-backed Shrike, the 4th of May being an average date; the Wryneck, which arrives at the same time, so far as our records go; and finally, the Spotted Flycatcher, a migrant laggard that does not appear much before the middle of the month. The above may be taken as a fairly representative account of the movements of the individuals of those species indigenous to the county, but long after our winter birds have left us and our summer migrants have appeared, other individuals belonging to the latter species arrive, and pass over the county on their way to more northern latitudes. Even such early migrants as Wheatears and Swallows are sometimes remarked at the Eddystone Lighthouse as late as the end of May and the beginning of June respectively. Of course, it is utterly impossible to distinguish these migrating individuals in most cases when on the mainland, but their late passage is an incontestable fact.

The spring migration of birds has scarcely come to an end before we have indications of the autumn passage. In the Tor Bay district the appearance of the Common Sandpiper upon the coast is the first sign we have of the autumn migration of birds.

This species appears on the shore here in small numbers towards the end of July. Perhaps about the same time (but not every year) an odd Wheatear or so is seen there too, and occasionally a bunch of Ringed Plovers with a solitary Sanderling. August inaugurates migration on a larger scale with the appearance of the Dunlin once more upon the mudflats. As the month slips by the coasts gradually assume the avine aspects characteristic of autumn. Common Sandpipers become increasingly abundant; Ringed Plovers and Sanderlings are perceptibly more numerous; and the Black-headed Gull and the Common Gull make their appearance to remain with us until the following spring. Coasting migrants also begin to arrive. The Spotted Crake is now passing Devon on its way to the south, likewise the Turnstone, the Little Stint, the Knot, the Greenshank, the Redshank, and the Whimbrel, all these species continuing to migrate over the county during the following month as well, and some of them even into October. Several of our own summer migrants begin to move south in August. Of these we may mention the Whitethroat, the Willow Wren, the Grasshopper Warbler, the

Spotted Flycatcher, the Swift, the Cuckoo, and the Wryneck. Most of these, however, prolong their stay into September; or, at any rate, the species—whether the same individuals or not it is almost impossible to say—continue in the county until then. The Swift, however, concludes its normal passage during August, beginning it, we may mention, at the end of July. The 10th of the month is a fair average date of disappearance from the Tor Bay district. In the years 1893, '95, '96, and '97 this was actually the last day we saw the species here; in 1898 they lingered to the 12th. During September many of our summer migrants finally disappear for the season. The Redstart then migrates south; the Red-backed Shrike, the Spotted Flycatcher, and the Turtle Dove do the same. In September the migration of the Ring Ouzel begins, as also does that of the Wheatear (with few exceptions), the Whinchat, the Blackcap, the Garden Warbler, the Wood Wren, the Sedge Warbler, the Tree Pipit, the Swallows and Martins, the Nightjar, the Hobby, the Quail, and the Corncrake. The migration, however, of all these species may be said to be continued into October, when the birds

finally disappear for the year (except in a few abnormal instances); but the passage of the Swallows is prolonged almost every year into the first days of November. The migration of these birds in autumn is exceptionally interesting. During the past season (1898) we spent the entire day on the sands on the 7th and 8th of September, watching a vast southern flight of Swallows and Martins, the former birds predominating. From early morning until the dusk of evening these birds were continually passing Paignton, flying exactly south. Many of the birds were flying a mile or more from land over the waters of the bay, but the majority flew either over the sands, close inshore, or a little way inland. Young birds, of course, were by far the most numerous; yet we should say that, generally speaking, each brood or double brood was accompanied by a pair of old birds. Tens of thousands must have passed over, especially on the 8th, in a fitful, fluttering throng. Some of the birds were feeding as they migrated, flying here and there in quest of insects, but never dallying long; others passed steadily over, and not a few occasionally burst into song. With a glass we could watch the

approaching birds coming along over the cliffs at Livermead or far out in the bay nearer Torquay. They were all flying steadily and at the same speed, which was moderately fast. Sometimes a scattered flock of from sixty to a hundred birds would pass, followed by straggling parties and twos and threes, and many odd individuals flying alone. In this irregular order they continued to pass hour by hour in one never-ending stream. Many birds flew low above the water or sand, and none were higher than forty or fifty yards in the air. At the end of Paignton sands the land rises into the Roundham headland, and when approaching this the birds rose in their course and flew steadily south across it. This course may have been followed across the Brixham headland, near Churston, and possibly have been continued with a little westerly deviation down to the Start, then across the Channel, where the French coast would be struck somewhere about Point du Sillon, in the Côtes du Nord. Not the least remarkable part of this grand migration of Swallows and Martins was the fact of their passing and at times literally mixing with other birds of these species that were spending

the summer here, the latter not migrating for a month or more afterwards. This we had many good opportunities of witnessing as we watched day by day these birds migrating south; for our own indigenous Swallows and Martins are numerous enough all day long in the locality that these migrants crossed over. We also meet with many migrants during spring and autumn along the shore, birds that are never seen in such localities except during the two seasons of passage.

A few of our regular winter visitors make their appearance upon the coast in August, as we have already indicated. In September a few examples of the Shoveler, the Teal, the Wigeon, the Scoter, the Jack Snipe, and small parties of Lesser Red-poles arrive, but these birds become more numerous during October and November. In October small numbers of the White-fronted Goose visit the county, the Tufted Duck arrives, also the Scaup, the Red-breasted Merganser, the Golden Plover, the Purple Sandpiper, the three species of Divers, the Great Crested and Slavonian Grebes, the Redwing and Fieldfare, the Brambling, Snow Bunting (but usually rare), and the Short-eared Owl. During October and November the Black

Redstart again appears upon the coast, and the flocks of Brent Geese pour down from the north. Now also may we expect the large flocks of Lapwings, the odd Bitterns, Siskins, Great Grey Shrikes, and Stone Curlews, that are sometimes a winter feature in the annals of bird-life here. It is a somewhat remarkable fact, however, in connection with these stray winter visitors that the Waxwing has not been known to visit the county for just upon fifty years. Thus is the cycle of migration in this southern county completed, although the phenomenon is almost a perennial one in Devon; for we have odd Swallows with us well into November, and Wheatears and Chiffchaffs back again in March—Spotted Flycatchers and Red-backed Shrikes appearing as late as May, Swallows still pursuing their northern flight in June, and Common Sandpipers returning south in July.

The rare abnormal avine visitors to the county scarcely demand notice in a work of the present character, but we may allude in passing to a few of the most interesting. Devonshire has been specially favoured by the visits of abnormal migrants from America. Of these may be mentioned the White-winged Crossbill, the American Bittern,

the Green-winged Teal, the Red-breasted Snipe, the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the American Stint, Bonaparte's Sandpiper, the Pectoral Sandpiper, the Spotted Sandpiper, the Killdeer Plover (seen only, conf. p. 189), and the Surf Scoter. For some unaccountable reason no mention is made in Messrs. D'Urban and Mathews' *Birds of Devon* of a fine male example of the Harlequin Duck, presumably shot in Tor Bay, and now in the Torquay Museum. We say presumably, for, unfortunately, there is neither date nor locality attached to the specimen. With the kind assistance of Mr. Elsc, we were enabled to ascertain that the bird was bought from Mr. Burt, a former curator, by the Torquay Natural History Society, for the sum of ten shillings, at a committee meeting held on the 4th of July 1861. Burt, we are assured, had no means of getting foreign skins, and evidently was ignorant of the value of the bird. He was a very keen collector, and either sold, or more generally presented, great numbers of birds (including many rarities) to the Society. We are confident that the specimen bears every appearance of being stuffed by him, and that other rare birds, well known to be local, are

without date or locality. Whether the bird be a Devonshire example or not, we consider that the above particulars should be recorded. From other parts of the world, among the abnormal migrants that have visited the county may be named the Little Egret, the Buff-backed Heron, the Squacco Heron, the Ibis, and the Purple Heron, all possibly from South Europe. Among the Ducks we have the Red-crested Pochard, the White-eyed Duck, and the Red-breasted Goose; among the Owls and Raptores we find the Snowy Owl, the Hawk Owl and the Little Owl, and the Greenland and Red-footed Falcons. Many examples of Pallas's Sand Grouse have been obtained here; likewise the Cream-coloured Courser and the Black-winged Stilt. Of the Gulls and Terns may be mentioned the unique Great Black-headed Gull, Sabine's Gull, and the Ivory Gull, the only example being in the Torquay Museum. Among the Passeres the list is equally remarkable, the Crested Lark, the Serin, the Woodchat, and Lesser Grey Shrikes, the Water Pipit, the Alpine Accentor, the Nutcracker, the Rufous Warbler, the Red-spotted Blue-throat, and White's Thrush. There are many other interesting birds that might

be mentioned, but their appearance in Devonshire in many cases scarcely deserves special record. Of these, however, we might instance the Rough-legged Buzzard, the Hoopoe, the Spoonbill, the Avocet, the Great Snipe, the two Bustards (Little and Great), Richard's Pipit, the Rose-coloured Pastor, the White-bellied Swift, the Roller, and the Bee-eater. One word, in conclusion, respecting the Shore Lark. This bird has twice been reported to have bred in the county, but in each case there can be no reasonable doubt that an error of identification has been made. The most recent instance related to our own particular neighbourhood—Tor Bay. But from the facts recorded we have no hesitation whatever in saying that the Red-backed Shrike was the species taken for the Shore Lark. My late old friend Else, than whom few men had a sounder knowledge of South Devon birds, informed me, shortly before his death, that parties of Shore Larks visited the Livermead district of Tor Bay every March. He assured me he had seen them, but had no means to hand to obtain specimens, and he always spoke of this bird as a somewhat familiar one round the bay. We have never seen the Shore Lark in Devonshire,

but of course we may just have missed them. An example has been recorded from Paignton.

We propose to bring the present chapter to a conclusion by a brief record of the more familiar ornithological events through the year, especially in this particular part of Devonshire. The phenomenally mild open climate of the county makes its influence felt upon the birds as upon all other living things. So gradually does autumn merge into spring, that we can scarcely say the habits of the birds in any way indicate the actual change of year. We have none of those sharp contrasts so prominent in the north; there is a wintry lull, and that is mostly all. Some of our finest song-birds warble the entire winter through, notably the Thrush, the Robin, the Wren, and the Starling. In January our local Hedge Sparrows pair, and towards the close of the month are in exceptionally fine voice, both these birds and Robins beginning to warble before dawn. The Starling also becomes unusually tuneful (although this species is in large flocks their movements are remarkably regular), as is also the Missel Thrush, and less frequently the Sky Lark. In very mild seasons we sometimes hear the Chaffinch by

the third week in January; but more usually its bright, cheery song is a striking feature of the early days of February. He is quite a month later to begin his vernal song in Yorkshire. An occasional Robin's nest is by no means unusual in this month. There is no change of importance taking place amongst bird-life on the coast, except that gales bring many species landwards, or severe weather inland drives other species to the shore or the low-lying lands in its vicinity. In February Ravens are breeding, and the Rooks and House Sparrows begin to build. Throughout this month the Song Thrush is in charming voice, often warbling well into the dusk, especially in some of the sheltered gardens and shrubberies. Towards the end of the month the Blackbird has regained his song, sometimes warbled, by the way, while the bird is standing on the ground, as we remarked during the present spring (12th April 1899). Soon after the middle of February the flocks of Yellow and Cirl Buntings, Chaffinches, and Greenfinches disband, and by the end of the month many of them are in pairs for the breeding season. In March a very perceptible increase in bird-song is apparent. The Yellow

Bunting sits and sings his oft-repeated refrain from the hedgerows, now gay here and there with white masses of bloom on the blackthorns; the Greenfinch twitters from the shrubberies; the Cirl Bunting regains his voice; the Thrush, Blackbird, and Missel Thrush may be heard all the livelong day; and the Robin, Wren, Hedge Sparrow, Chaffinch, and Starling are literally overflowing with music. By the middle of the month we may be on the look-out for the first venturesome summer migrants. Rarely is our quest in vain; for generally an odd Wheatear or Chiffchaff, or less frequently a Sand Martin, will reward our search. By the end of the month the Black Redstart has disappeared from the old sheltered haunts below the cliffs; and many of our winter birds almost imperceptibly grow fewer and fewer. The Divers and Grebes pass northwards; the Fieldfares and Redwings vanish, we scarcely know when or how, as the month ebbs away. Some time in March many birds begin nesting—Missel Thrushes, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, House Sparrows, Titmice, Hedge Sparrows, Chaffinches, Robins, and so on. April is one of our busiest months among the birds.

Now is the wondrous phenomenon of migration unfolding its oft-repeated story, and all our summer migrants, with one or two exceptions, appear in their accustomed haunts. As day by day goes by, we detect the song or presence of species after species: avine music is now abundant on every side. Now, too, are our woods and hedge-banks gay with anemones, star flowers, mock strawberries, red campions, dog and white violets, and primroses in abundance; the trees are bursting into leaf; the orchards are aflame with bloom. Most of our remaining shore and sea birds now take their departure—Brent Geese, Wigeon, Teal, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Scoters, and Red-breasted Mergansers, among the Duck tribe; Plovers, Jack Snipes, and Purple Sandpipers from the shore; Common Gulls, Kittiwakes, and Black-headed Gulls, also Guillemots and Razorbills from the seas. During this month there are other stranger species passing over the county and along the coast, all speeding north to breed. Among these coasting migrants in April we have the Turnstone and the Whimbrel. With the advent of May, this coasting migration becomes even more intense, among the passers being the Little Stint, the

Greenshank, the Redshank, the Knot, the Common Sandpiper, the Whimbrel, and the Bar-tailed Godwit. May also brings us the graceful Terns, which pass along more or less close to the shore, on their way to the breeding places. Almost all of our resident species are breeding during this month, while the earliest of the summer migrants begin doing so towards the close. May is but a continuation of April, so far as concerns the majority of our birds. It is also marked by the arrival of the last batch of our summer migrants, and by the final rush across the county of various polar breeding birds. It is also the month of the Cuckoo, that bird's full merry notes sounding far and near at intervals from all the country-side whilst daylight lasts. As April saw the Missel Thrush become mute, the present month marks a perceptible waning in the songs of our earliest breeders; but this waning melody is scarce remarked amidst the crash of song from the tuneful throats of the migrant Warbler hosts; whilst the Swifts are particularly noisy, as they sweep in parties about their breeding places towards evening, or chase each other round the thatched cottages, under the eaves of which they

yearly nest. Many young birds are now abroad, Blackbirds, Thrushes, Robins, Wrens, Hedge Sparrows, Larks, Tits, and Finches. Now, too, may the note of the Stock Dove be particularly remarked round the cliffs, and the first broods of young Ring Doves are out upon the wing. Birds are also busy along the shore. Ringed Plovers are breeding, and the Herring Gulls are nesting on the cliffs; so, too, are the Cormorants and Shags, and the Stormy Petrel has once more returned to its nesting place. Jackdaws, Carrion Crows, and Jays are deep in family cares; young Rooks and Starlings are out on the trees and about the pastures with their parents. June marks a decline in avine melody; there are still many individual singers, but the concert is not so general, and the voices of most of our early birds are waning. The summer migrants are still breeding, some, such as the Goatsucker, the Brown Flycatcher, and the Turtle Dove, having eggs. Right through the month most birds continue in more or less fitful voice, but with the advent of July a strange silence begins to steal over the woods and groves. Here and there a few belated birds are still breeding; here and there nests of the earlier birds

may be found provided for the second or even the third broods. By the middle of the month the Thrushes are mostly silent; so, too, are the Robins, Wrens, and Hedge Sparrows; the Blackcap and the Willow Wren sing less and less frequently; the Cuckoo and the Chaffinch entirely lose their voice. The moulting season is now at hand, and most of our small birds skulk whilst the change of plumage is undergone. Many birds now begin to form into compact flocks—a sure sign of the waning year. Vast flocks of Starlings and Finches congregate about the fields; parties of summer migrants may be seen, the broods and their parents living thus together until the time of departure arrives. Now also may be seen the first signs of that returning migration of shore birds, inaugurated by the Common Sandpiper. Towards the close of the month the Swifts—old and young—begin to assemble, and often soar to vast heights in the hot summer evenings, and with the advent of August they, the first of all the migrant band, begin to prepare for early departure. We finally miss them here about the 10th. August marks the departure of some of our more familiar summer birds, as it also does the arrival of others

that are to be our winter guests. The Whitethroat now thinks about Africa ; so, too, does the Spotted Flycatcher and the Cuckoo. Upon the shore, the Sanderling and the Ringed Plovers appear in company with their young ; while many Common and Black-headed Gulls return to the seas they frequent during the winter. Now also begin to repass such high northern birds as Knots, Turnstones, Little Stints, Greenshanks, Redshanks, and Whimbrels. The mudflats once more exhibit signs of avine life, from which they have long been free. Our smaller birds are mostly moulting, yet now and then we hear a song from some young Thrush. Swallows and Martins are now in large companies ; the young broods are strong upon the wing, though still fed chiefly by their parents. The Sedge Warblers are so silent and skulking that we might almost think that they had already gone. September brings many important changes amongst our feathered favourites. This month marks the departure of the great majority ; and it also brings us various Ducks and Geese from northern lands, and additions to the numbers of species already named in the previous month. Now comes the first of the Jack Snipes, and

parties of Lesser Redpoles. Now depart most of the Swallows, the Turtle Dove, the Goatsucker, and the Quail. A pleasing feature is the resumption of song by the Robin, the Wren, the Song Thrush, and the Missel Thrush. The Willow Wren and the Chiffchaff also often regain their voices towards the end of the month; while the Starling, the Greenfinch, the Chaffinch, the Yellow Bunting, and the Sky-Lark sing, if somewhat irregularly. October sees the final departure of all our summer migrants, except a few odd Swallows and Martins; the close of that coasting migration which is such a regular feature in the county; the advent of most of our winter visitors, including the Black Redstart; the general resumption of song by our perennial choristers; and the final flocking of those birds that spend the winter months in a gregarious state. One of the most pleasing features of the month, to our mind, is the exquisitely beautiful song of the Robin. Amidst the dripping painted foliage the Robin's voice is heard continually, amidst

Autumn leaves in ruddy glory,
 Falling softly through the air,
 Telling now the old, old story
 Of another waning year.

November brings the final transformation; one set of bird-life is completely replaced by another; the coasts and the seas and waters near them are again filled with interesting birds; the inland thickets and hedgerows are deserted by the migrant birds that are in constant attendance upon summer, and the cycle of the year is almost complete. December introduces to us here the various winter wanderers that roam about the country-side in quest of food, and we often make the acquaintance of less familiar species that want brings to our thresholds. But fortunately in Devonshire such cold spells are exceptional, and our little favourites are seldom in absolute want for long together. Snowstorms visit us occasionally, and drive the birds before them. Rough weather in the moorland areas sometimes sends large numbers of birds down to the lowlands, but compared with more northern counties avine movement is never so strongly manifest. Our stubbles are seldom covered with snow for long together, especially in the district of the South Hams; frosts rarely seal the waters sufficiently to prevent birds obtaining their food in them. Here, in the hedges and about the orchards and

farm-buildings, as well as on the open fields, birds in plenty may be watched the winter through; the sea and the shore at this season ever teem with interest for the ornithologist; while the country around is a chosen resort of bird-life in abundance. All the winter through, in sheltered spots, bees and butterflies and other insects are to be met with; bats, dormice, and other hibernating creatures sleep lightly; and the naturalist, more especially the ornithologist, may rest assured of plenty of occupation in a county where autumn is joined to spring by an unbroken succession of flowers and a perennial chorus of avine song!

THE END.

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